

# GEOGRAPHICAL

## MAGAZINE

*Spring  
Number*



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Worst Journey

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The Kathakali of Malabar

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The South Coast of Brittany





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# Explorers' Maps

## V. European Rivalry for the Spice Islands

by R. A. SKELTON

*This series of articles by the Superintendent of the Map Room at the British Museum presents, in regional order, some episodes in the history of exploration for which the evidence of maps is specially interesting or accessible. The text is to be read as a commentary on the maps and not as a connected history of discovery. Mr Skelton, having dealt with the search for sea routes from Europe to the Far East, shows the cartographic results of the competition which followed*

THAT Columbus in 1492 had discovered a westerly route to "the Indies" was at first generally accepted. At his interview with King John II of Portugal on his return, the king did not conceal his chagrin, exclaiming "Why did I let slip an enterprise of so great importance?" The interests of Portugal, long committed to the quest for an easterly sea-way to the Indies, were indeed deeply involved, and a diplomatic settlement with the new colonial power of Spain was needed to safeguard her own expansion and overseas discoveries. This was reached in the capitulation or treaty of Tordesillas, concluded between Spain and Portugal in 1494, which drew a *raya*, or line of demarcation, in the Atlantic 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands.

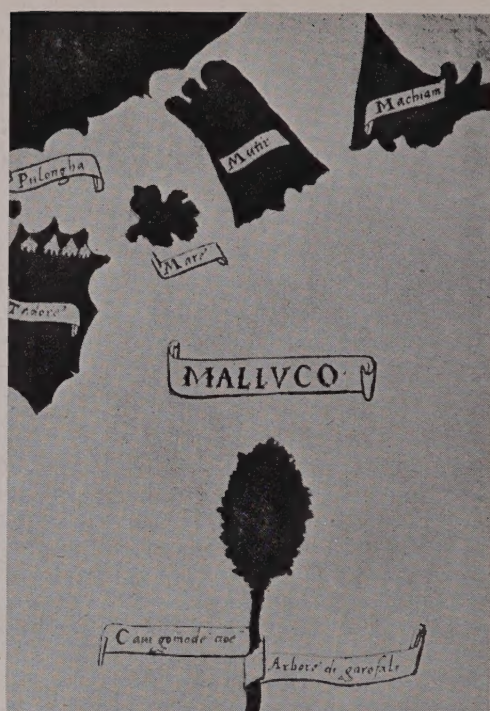
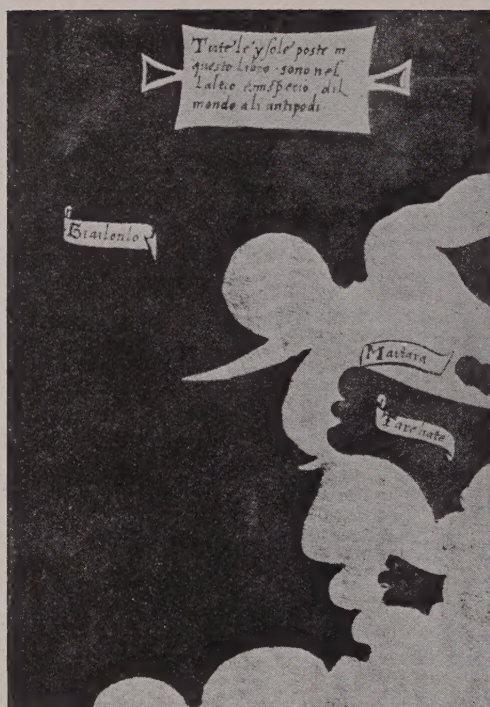
Portugal's eagerness to establish the dividing line as far west as possible, in order to secure a foothold in the new world which she perhaps already suspected to exist, was however to place in jeopardy her rights of discovery in the Far East. Her expansion eastwards across the Indian Ocean to the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, in the early years of the new century, focused attention on the antipodal continuation of the *raya*, 180° of longitude distant from the Atlantic line. Magellan himself had perhaps been with Serrão to the Moluccas in 1512, and these islands, the source and centre of the spice trade, were the objective of his voyage under the Spanish flag begun in 1519. He intended (as a Portuguese agent in Seville wrote) to sail across the Pacific "West and WNW direct to Maluco, which land of Maluco I have seen laid down in the globe and chart which Fernando de Reynell made here . . . and his father [Pedro Reinell] finished the whole and marked these lands of Maluco, and on this pattern are constructed all the charts which Diogo Ribeiro makes". The three cartographers here named were, like Magellan, Portuguese who had carried into the service

of Spain the knowledge of the East Indies and the route thither learnt in the employment of the King of Portugal.

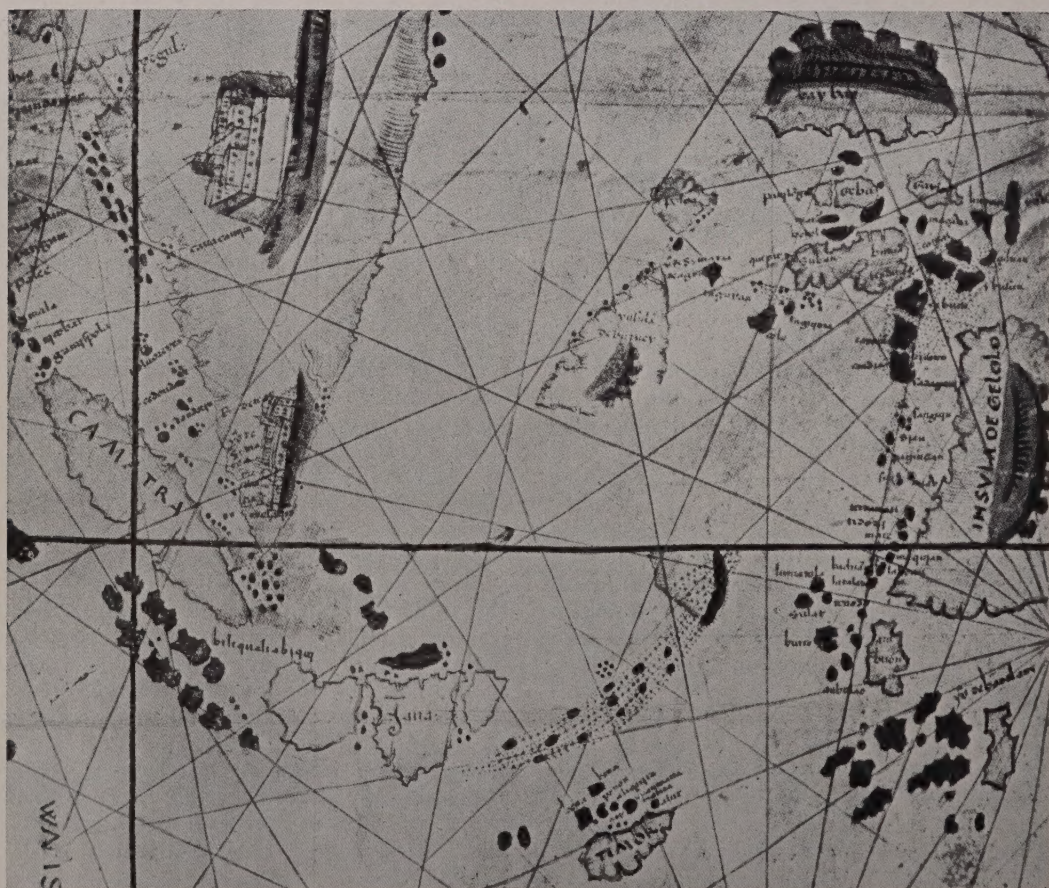
The route of the *Victoria* through the Eastern Archipelago, after Magellan's death off Cebu, is recorded in the sketch maps of Antonio Pigafetta, the chronicler of the expedition (Fig. 1); and her return in 1522, with a cargo of cloves picked up at Tidore in the Moluccas, awakened the Spaniards to the value of this trade. The interest of the King of Portugal now lay in plotting the *raya* sufficiently far to the east to embrace the Spice Islands in his sphere. At a *junta* or conference held at Badajoz in 1524, the leading pilots and cartographers of the two countries, including (for Spain) the Reinells, Nuño Garcia who had drawn Magellan's charts (Fig. 2), and Diogo Ribeiro, expounded their views on the longitude of the Moluccas in relation to the dividing line. By the Portuguese the islands were sited 43° west of the anti-meridian, by the Spanish 3° east of it—the position assigned in the official Spanish world-map, the *padron real*, after its revision in 1526. In the absence of any method of determining longitude other than dead reckoning, and with national partisanship at work, no agreement was reached; but in 1529 Spain sold her claim and the *raya* was laid down, by consent, 17° east of the Moluccas, which were thus (correctly) located within the Portuguese sphere.

During the middle decades of the 16th century Portugal's control of commerce in the Indian Ocean and with south-east Asia was not challenged by any other European nation, and for the rest of the century Portuguese maps supplied the standard representation of the East Indies and neighbouring coasts and waters. The leading Portuguese cartographers of this period were Lopo Homem and his son Diogo, Fernão Vaz Dourado, who was born and worked at Goa, and Luiz Teixeira. Their elaborately decor-





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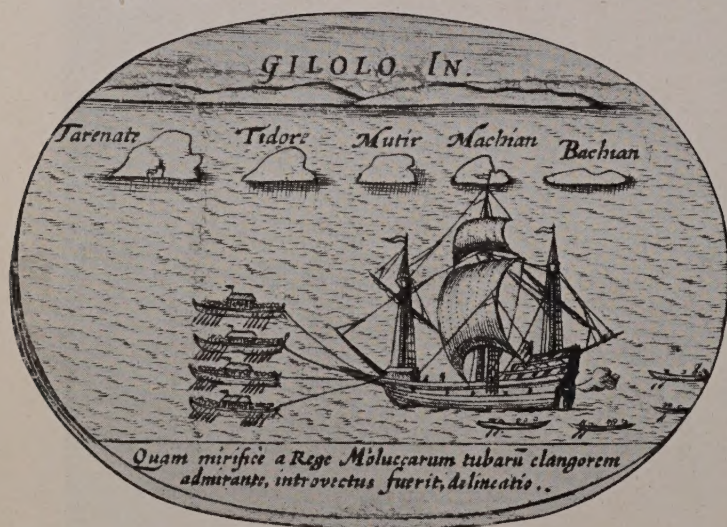


All illustrations, except three, from the *British Museum*

(Fig. 1: opposite, top) The northern Moluccas, from two of the sketches made by Antonio Pigafetta during the first circumnavigation. These islands were visited in November–December 1521, after Magellan's death, by his two surviving ships, the *Victoria* and *Trinidad*, and a cargo of cloves was taken aboard at Tidore. The right-hand sketch shows a clove-tree ("arbores di garofali"). (Fig. 2: opposite, bottom) The East Indies, from a MS map by Nuño García de Torenó, 1522. The Archipelago is drawn from information brought back in that year by the survivors of Magellan's expedition. The eastern raya or anti-meridian, here laid down for the first time on a map, passes through Sumatra—and thus assigns the Spice Islands and the Malay Peninsula to Spain. (Fig. 3: above) A typical Portuguese representation of the East Indies in the mid-16th century, from a MS sea-atlas drawn in 1558 by Diogo Homem. The Moluccas ("Malucos") are clearly marked



(Fig. 4: right) Detail of a world-map engraved by Jodocus Hondius, probably about 1595, depicting the circumnavigations of Drake (1577–80) and Cavendish (1586–8). Drake's route, here marked by the large ship and the line of dots, had led him across the Pacific to the Moluccas. At Ternate in 1579 he established friendly relations with the Sultan and took on board a load of spices. This was regarded in Drake's day as one of the most notable events of his voyage. (Below) An inset from the same map shows Drake's ship, the Golden Hind, towed into harbour by the war-canoes of the Sultan of Ternate, who was rowed alongside "marvelling at the sound of trumpets" proceeding from the English ship



ated charts and atlases (Fig. 3), rich in place-names, showed the coasts frequented by the Portuguese ships, with their principal trading centres in the Archipelago on the islands of Celebes, Banda, "Gilolo" (Halmahera), Ternate and Amboina in the Moluccas. The east coasts of Borneo and Celebes and the south coasts of Java and New Guinea were still unknown. To the north the Philippines remained in Spanish hands.

The official policy of secrecy was no longer maintained by Portugal or at any rate did not extend to her eastern empire. Portuguese charts of the Far East and the route thither circulated freely abroad and were reproduced

in the printed maps and atlases of Mercator and Ortelius. Netherlanders sailed as factors and pilots in Portuguese ships and were established as merchants in Goa and other Portuguese settlements overseas. Portuguese pilots entered the service of England after the union of Spain and Portugal in 1580. From such sources English and Dutch adventurers drew their information on the East Indian trade and navigation.

By 1580 English hopes of finding a passage to the Far East by the north of Asia had been disappointed. The concentration of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires under the crown of Philip II, which closed the Lisbon spice market to English merchants, lent political support to projects for direct trade with the East Indies, both as a source for spices and as an "ample vent of our wollen cloth, the naturall commoditie of this our Realme". Drake, after his crossing of the Pacific, had in November 1579 visited Ternate, whose sultan sought his aid against the Portuguese and "sent to our Generall with speciall message that . . . hee would yield himselfe and the right of his island to bee at the pleasure and commandment of so famous a prince as we served" (Fig. 4). This "message" could be, and was,





(Fig. 5) A chart of the East Indies, from Portuguese sources, published in 1595 at Amsterdam by Linschoten. (North is at the left.) The Portuguese knew the Philippines and Moluccas in detail, but not the east coasts of Borneo and Celebes or the south coast of Java. Java's width was considerably exaggerated (cf. Fig. 10)









(Fig. 8: above) Plan of Bantam in Java, perhaps by Lodewijcksz, supercargo in Houtman's squadron which called there in 1596. Here merchandise from China and the Moluccas was traded for Javanese pepper. (Fig. 9: below) Linschoten's illustration of an Indian market and its commodities, showing pepper, betel ("arecca"), and night jasmine ("arborescens") found in India and Malacca







(Fig. 10) Part of a world-map by Cornelis Houtman, with the track of the first Dutch fleet to reach the East Indies (1596-7). Passing through the Sunda Straits, Houtman traded at Bantam (Fig. 8) and sailed on to Bali (Fig. 7), to the east of Java. While returning he cruised along the south coast of Java, which he found "neither to be so broad nor to extend so far south as the chart draws it," (cf. Fig. 5) "otherwise we should have sailed through the middle of the island"

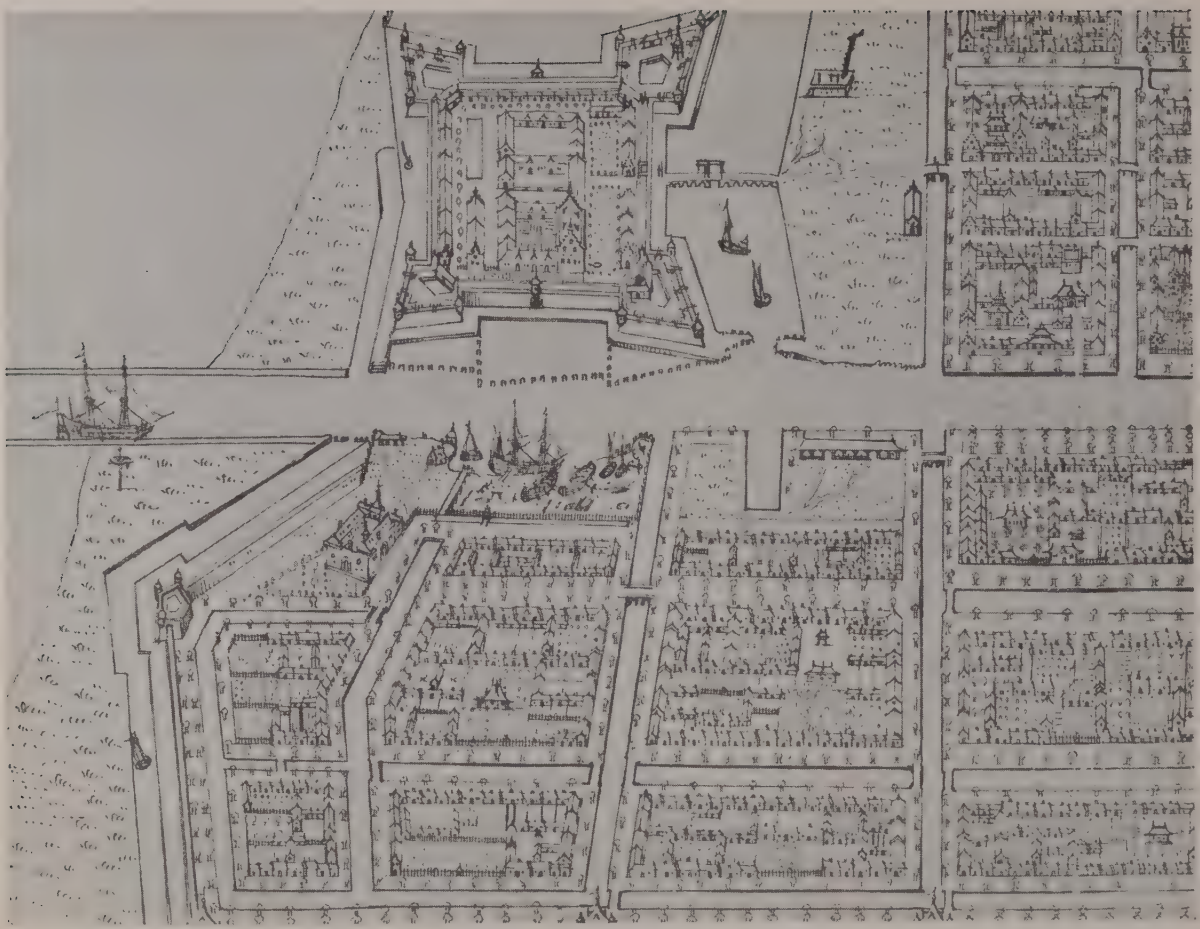




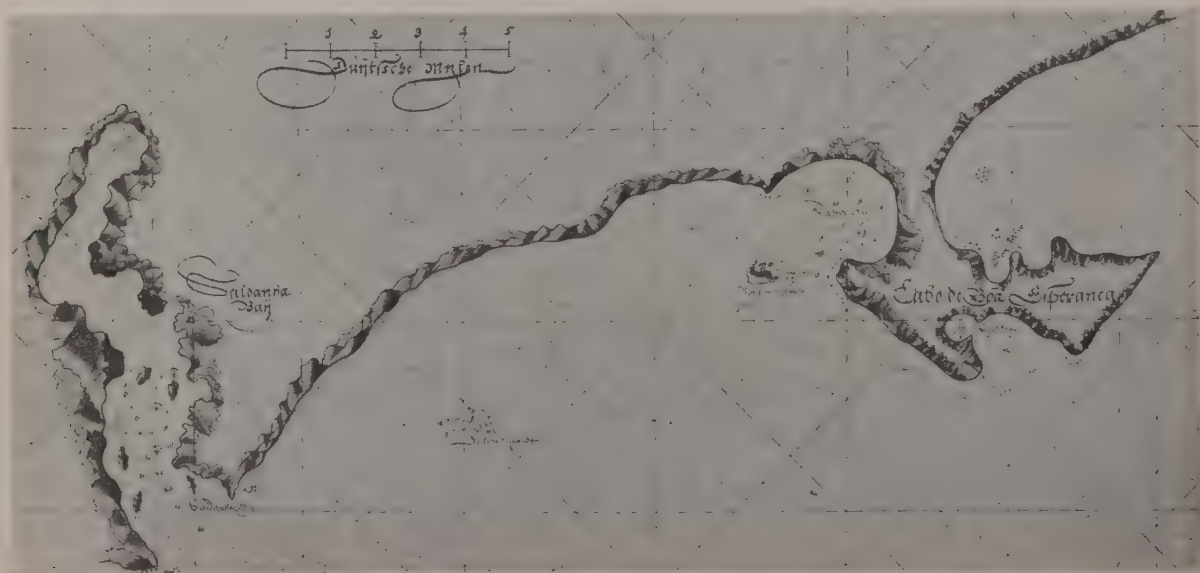
(Fig. 11) An early view of Amboina, showing the Dutch fort taken from the Portuguese in 1605. This island, south of Ceram, became the centre of the Dutch-controlled spice trade in the eastern part of the Archipelago







(Fig. 13: above) Part of a Dutch MS plan of Batavia, drawn about 1650. After the first settlement in 1610 on the river Jacarta in north Java, this new city was founded by Jan Pietersz. Coen in 1619.  
 (Fig. 14: below) The Cape of Good Hope: a chart, drawn about 1660, for the use of Dutch East Indiamen







(Fig. 15: above) The earliest English map of the Mogul territories, drawn from Sir Thomas Roe's information by William Baffin, master's mate of the ship in which Roe returned to England from India in 1619.  
 (Fig. 16: below) Achin, Sumatra, drawn by the English master of the Kempthorne, on a voyage in 1686-8





English at Hakluyt's instance in 1598, provided valuable intelligence on the Portuguese empire in the East, "where" wrote Hakluyt in 1599 "their strength is nothing so great as heretofore hath bene supposed", and it encouraged English and Dutch ventures. Linschoten himself sailed with Dutch expeditions for a North-East Passage in 1594 and 1595, and the Latin edition of the *Itinerario* (1599) contained Barents' polar chart recording his voyage to Novaya Zemlya in 1596-7. The first Dutch expedition to the East Indies by the Cape (1595-7), under Cornelis Houtman, had opened up trade with Bantam, the great pepper port on the north coast of Java (Figs. 6-8). After sailing east to Bali (Fig. 7), Houtman returned by the south of Java, which was thus shown to be an island, although no details of its south coast were put on the maps for many years. A second Dutch fleet, under Jacob van Neck and Wybrant Warwijck, whose pilots were instructed by Plancius, made a voyage to the Archipelago in 1598-1600 and established a factory at Bantam. The account of Houtman's voyage was written by Willem Lodewijcksz, a supercargo in the fleet; a map of the East Indies by Lodewijcksz and world-maps by Houtman and van Neck commemorated these early Dutch enterprises (Fig. 10). Meanwhile the Dutch had attempted the westerly route to the Moluccas, that of Magellan; and in 1598-1601 Olivier van Noort made the first Dutch circumnavigation, without the loss of a ship, returning by the Philippines. In 1602 the Dutch United East India Company was formed by a merger of the various companies hitherto engaged, and Plancius was appointed cartographer to the new company.

The first voyage of the English company was made in 1601-3 by a fleet (Fig. 12) under the command of Lancaster. Lancaster reached Achin, in Sumatra, and Bantam where he loaded pepper and set up a factory—the first English trading post in the East. This became the centre of English trade in the Archipelago, where a period of commercial rivalry between the English and Dutch now began. Captain Thomas Middleton, commanding the English company's second venture (1604-6), reached Ternate; but the Dutch, by their capture of Tidore and Amboina (Fig. 11) from the Portuguese in 1605—in the presence of Middleton's ships—and by the foundation of their factory and settlement of Batavia on the north coast of Java (Fig. 13) in 1610, had soon won dominating positions on the trade routes between the Straits of Malacca and the Moluccas.

The English company, lacking the government support enjoyed by the Dutch, had by 1623 been ousted from the Archipelago; but it found a new and profitable field for enterprise, at the expense of the Portuguese, in India, to which Captain Thomas Best led a fleet in 1612 and where commercial relations were established by Sir Thomas Roe's mission to the Great Mogul in 1615-18 (Fig. 15).

From Batavia and their other bases in south-east Asia the Dutch, following the Portuguese, had extended their trade into the China Sea and as far north as Japan; and in the 17th century they reached the north and west coasts of Australia. These advances and their Pacific explorations will be described in later articles.

In 1614 Hakluyt's incessant advocacy of instruction in the "Art of Navigation" as a means "of breeding up of skilfull Sea-men and Mariners" bore fruit in the appointment of a lecturer in navigation to the East India Company, with instructions to "examine their journals and mariners and perfect their plots". Here the English company was following precedents and an administrative procedure long established by the government of Spain, where the pilots of the Casa de Contratación at Seville had these duties, and more recently by the Dutch companies. The English company's initiative produced few original charts before the end of the 17th century (Fig. 16), but the "period of exploitation" which followed that of exploration of the East Indies by the Dutch yielded a rich harvest for cartography. Plancius was in 1619 followed as cartographer to the United East India Company by Hessel Gerritsz, and after his death in 1632 the post was held in succession by William Jansz. Blaeu (1633-8) and by his son Joan.

The Dutch pilots and captains were supplied with charts of the eastern navigation drawn in Blaeu's workshop, and were required on their return to deliver in the charts to Blaeu with their corrections. Thus a continuous revision and improvement of the prototype became possible. Charts were also drawn by pilots at Batavia (Fig. 13), the centre of government in the East, and these too were forwarded to Blaeu for information and copying. Thus the coasts frequented by the Dutch East Indiamen and the ocean bases—St Helena, the Cape (Fig. 14), Mauritius, Ceylon—which served as stages on their route to the East were systematically covered by a regular hydrographic service over a century and a half before the supply of charts to ships' captains was organized by the British Admiralty.



# The Kathakali of Malabar

by ELLA MAILLART

*The author, Genevan by birth, is known mainly through her six books about Asia where she has always travelled away from the beaten track: her Forbidden Journey describes experiences shared with Peter Fleming in Central Asia. She spent the war years in South India; two years ago she returned to Travancore where the ancient Hindu Kathakali dance-drama is undergoing a revival*

THE most fascinating spectacle that I have ever enjoyed is to be found in the State of Travancore on the south-west coast of India. There one is sometimes reminded of far-away China when looking at the upturned roofs of the houses, or when watching a fighting scene in a Kathakali drama. As for the facial disguises of gods and demons, they sometimes recall the terrible masks of Tibetan devils.

To be perfect, such a spectacle has to take place where it was born: in the court before a Hindu temple, during the warm nights of a tropical spring heavy with the sweet and intoxicating smells of the pre-monsoon weather.

*Kathakali*, or "story play", as the spectacle is called, is meant to please the gods; it begins with a prayer and ends with another. It consists of a mimed dance and I was told that this follows a strict traditional code of significant gestures including thirteen head-movements, thirty-six glances, and sixty-four hand-positions or *mudras*. Shiva is said to have created it and presented it to mankind because it teaches how the bliss of self-forgetfulness leads to the supreme experience of oneness. In Vedic times, dancing was a sacred rite. But during the 17th century the Rajah of Kottarakara gave this dance a particular character by mixing it with mythological subjects dear to the people.

In order to be rightly inspired, the Rajah sat alone by the seaside where he entered into a meditation. Shining visions came to him by which he learnt how he was to dress the dancers so that they would personify immortal characters. Those visions rose from the sea, only the upper bodies being seen above the water; hence, all costumes have a similar lower part: a white skirt so voluminous that it is nearly horizontal, the folds of which represent the waves of the sea.

When I hear the word "Kathakali", which calls to mind the subdued beating of the Malabar drum, I remember the vast courtyard of the Chengannur Temple made alive by the dancing flames of the single oil-lamp placed before the stage. I remember the virile actors fighting with great energy, in spite of

their colossal tiaras and voluminous costumes.

I had already been there during the previous night wearing a *sari* and accompanied by a Hindu. On the second day an official, having asked for my name, wrote down "Ela Maya"; when he asked whether I was a Hindu I had to say "yes" to avoid trouble: I had already once entered the sacred place and if it became known that I was not a Hindu, who knows what kind of pollution my presence would have meant? My name seemed to be Hindu, so all was well! (Later I came to understand that my companion wanted to break down the ancient orthodoxy which was much disputed, the modern people maintaining that there was only one caste, one God and one religion.)

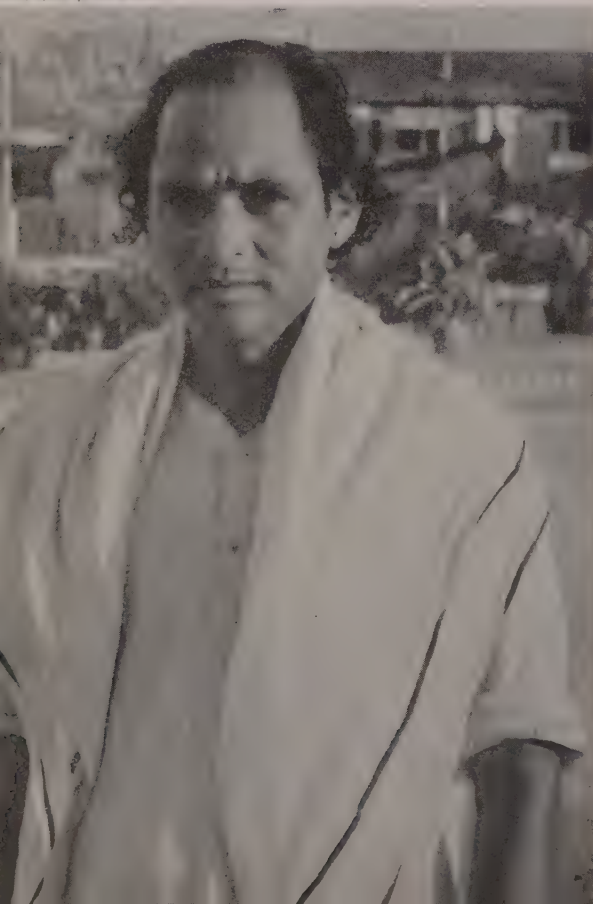
The wide avenue leading to the temple was lit by candelabras with five or eight branches, carried by brown men wrapped in a white cloth around their hips. The air was filled with music, two oboes accompanied by a drum. My eyes were fascinated by the star musician: his appearance conveyed such unearthly perfection that he might have been an immortal... but for the watch disfiguring his wrist. Not for a moment did the powerful action of his throat distort his smooth neck, his pale cheeks or his brown chest, on which shone a thin golden chain. His legs and his arching loins were tightly wrapped in a red silk cloth with golden edges. The black waves of his rich hair were gathered in a knot low on his neck. Never did his rapt gaze rest on the spectators: he lived solely for the strange music which he created, which he accompanied and sent, so to speak, in different directions with the whole movement of his lithe body prolonged by that thin black tube. The flat cheek, straight nose and piercing glance could have been those of a gypsy.

The play lasted throughout the night. I could not understand the Malayalam lines chanted by two reciters to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and a gong. But I was soon under the spell of the contrasting rhythms, of the flames flickering at the heart of the dark night, of the gestures made by





photographs by the author



(Above) *The sacred tank and temple at Trivandrum, where Kathakali dramas are performed.*  
 (Left) *The Kathakali actor Kudamallur Karunakara: religious devotion, physical vigour and long practice are needed for the traditional roles of the silent, powerfully mimed drama*

these silent athletes impersonating immortal heroes or celestial damsels.

They were acting *The Defeat of Kalakeya* : Indra sends his son Arjuna to paradise where a nymph falls in love with him; and later on Arjuna has great difficulty in vanquishing the demon Kalakeya. Arjuna was played by Ramon Pillai whose powerful mimicry has to be seen to be believed. The instantaneous reactions of the public were astonishing; they revealed to me the quick humour, the healthy gaiety of a Malayali audience. So far I had only seen the somewhat dull and conventional side of these brown Southerners, probably influenced by the stilted English they use with us. Now their true nature came to the fore : until one has laughed with people, one cannot begin to know them.

And how surprising to see all traces of the languor or tropical indolence of those Malayali actors vanish when the thundering footwork of great gods indicated a battle-royal, or when the king of the demons shook the curtain in a growling frenzy at the *tiranoku*—



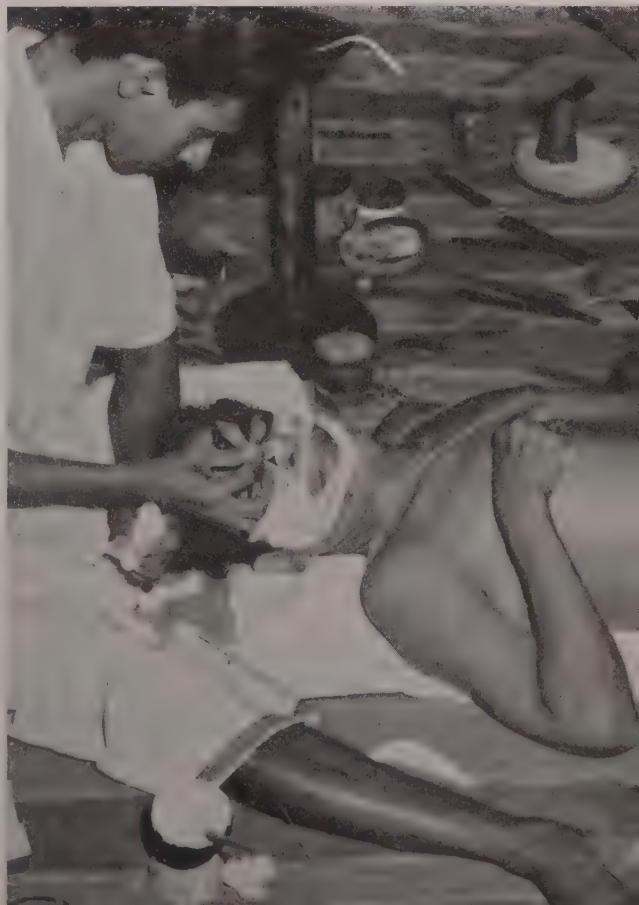


(Above) *Kathakali green-room. Kunya Panikkar paints his moustaches in front of the oil-lamp; behind him a double bustle, to support many skirts, is being secured to Ramon Pillai. (Right) The chutti (fringes of paper) are fixed in place with a paste of flour and lime*

entry upon the stage—in token of his terrible powers, or roared his anger at seeing the pure sacred flame of the oil-lamp in front of him, while his bloodshot eyes rolled in his black-and-red face!

There was no longer a man called Champakulam Pachu Pillai on the stage, but the embodiment of a legendary being now and forever alive, a force for good or evil. The patiently acquired skill of the actor was no longer his own, since it had been dedicated to the god he was impersonating.

In order to understand better the particular quality of a Kathakali drama, one ought to watch the actors getting ready in the silence of the 'green-room'; in that straw hut, they all sit around the oil-lamp. Each dancer applies grease-paint to his face, having mixed with oil certain yellow and indigo powders producing the green colour of good heroes; soot-black, red arsenic and rice-flour for the bad Titans. Sages and women retain their normal skin-colour. Then each in turn lies down near the make-up specialist, while





meditating religiously on his part. The specialist builds up magnificent masks which no movement of the face will be able to loosen. Like a pastry-maker squeezing cream onto a cake, from chin to temple he spreads a caterpillar of white paste (flour and lime) to which will adhere the *chutti*: a white fringe enhancing mimicry while rendering faces quite inhuman. Famous demons wear a kind of white mushroom on nose and forehead, boars' tusks, golden claws and a red beard.

The time comes when the actor goes to the wall where the costumes hang on a string. Some eighty knots are needed till all is well fastened on him, not only the many skirts over their two bustles, but the three blouses of red flannel which will absorb the abundant perspiration of the dancer, the ankle-bells, armlets, necklaces, breast-plates, wigs, ear-pendants, head-scarves, jewels and plumes. This is the last minute during which the artist can still speak, before he picks up the huge tiara, the divine headgear or *kiritam*, with its disc-like aureole. The man prays to the deity he will impersonate; when the *kiritam* is on his head, the spirit of a god—perhaps the Lord Krishna himself—has entered into him and he would not cease to behave like a god even if the Rajah of Travancore were to approach him.

Known by everybody, the dramas thus enacted seem to liberate obscure forces latent in the hearts of the spectators. During certain particularly good performances a spell seems to fall over the audience and the actors live quite beyond themselves. What they enact appears more real than real life.

One night at Aranmula they played *Duriodhana*: the bad king refused to restore their lands to the five Pandava brothers, not even a village each, nor even a house. At that moment, distressed by the bad king's obstinacy, a spectator rose and shouted: "Then I am going to give them each a house!"

Appearing on the stage of a town theatre, the actors miss their proper surroundings. They no longer step out of the dark night of the past. But near temple walls, the right psychic atmosphere is provided; and a public of connoisseurs helps to create a perfect ambience in which dance, drama and music live in their original unity.

All round the brim of the tall lamp the cotton wicks sizzle in the warm-smelling oil. Great palm-leaves rustle in the wind while the precise mudras, or hand-gestures, of the actors link the story together through either heroic or feminine rhythms. The light is dancing too . . . one lives in a timeless world, while a marvellous dream seems to have come to life.







(Left) *Arjuna, hero of The Defeat of Kalakeya, with the King of the Hunters who assists him in his adventures. As the son of a god, he is wearing the divine headgear or kiritam; and his heroic character is identified by the greenish colour of his face.*  
 (Below) *Arjuna and his opponent the demon Kalakeya, both partly made up, show the contrast of the heroes' green and the colour proper to demons—red*

*Kodachromes by the author*

(Opposite) *Entering upon the stage, the demon Kalakeya tears down the curtain in the tiran-  
 ku gesture to demonstrate his powers, which are also denoted by his white-knobbed nose and red collar of bristling beard*





# The South Coast of Brittany

by K. ADLARD COLES

*The former Editor of The Yachtsman, who gives us this sailor's view of a land wedded to the sea, besides making many long-distance cruises in small yachts has competed successfully in numerous races in the Bay of Biscay and in the Transatlantic Race, which he won in 1950. The last-named is described in North Atlantic, the best-known of twelve books on yachting which he has written*

"LEAVE to port Ushant, the Basse Froide (Ar Men) buoy, the Glénan Isles, the Ile de Groix, Belle-Ile" . . . "and so to the finish off La Rochelle".

Thus read the racing instructions of the Royal Ocean Racing Club, which gave me my first introduction to the Bay of Biscay. I turned for guidance to the Admiralty Chart. Some twenty-five miles south-east of Ushant, which I knew by reputation, I found the Pointe du Raz, and off it the Chaussée de Sein, or the "Saints" as they are called by British seamen. These form a finger of rocks and ledges protruding into the Atlantic for a distance of nearly fifteen miles, and near the seaward end I found marked the Ar Men lighthouse and the buoy.

It was not, however, in this race or during the many which followed in my yachts *Cohoe I* and *Cohoe II* that I became familiar with the coast. When racing, one's whole attention is occupied with navigation and getting the utmost out of the boat, and often all that may be seen of the land is the flash at night of some distant lighthouse. It was on the leisurely cruises homewards after the races that I had time to sail along the coast and enter the harbours and anchorages of the fascinating part of Brittany which lies between the Chaussée de Sein and St Nazaire.

This hundred miles or so is peculiarly 'of the sea' for there is no straight line of demarcation between the land and the Atlantic Ocean which, provoked by the prevailing westerly winds, here penetrates it; first meeting a fringe of granite islands and rocks, then rolling onwards through the wide gaps between them to the indented coastline of the mainland, and finally flooding up the tidal estuaries of the rivers into the peaceful rural scenery of inland Brittany. Thus, instead of a hundred miles of coastline with an occasional port, the Bretons in this area have hundreds of miles of islands, rocks, estuaries and rivers with scores of harbours and countless landing-places where smaller boats can be drawn up out of danger. It can truly be said that they live with the sea around them; and out of the

sea they have wrested their living from time immemorial, as is evidenced by the megalithic monuments, the "menhirs", still standing in the most inaccessible places and remote islands.

The Ile de Sein is the first island the sailor finds as, after rounding Ushant, he approaches this part of Brittany. It is some five miles from the Pointe du Raz, perhaps the most impressively savage headland in France. Between the headland and the Ile de Sein lies a great tidal race, which has claimed a vast number of victims throughout the ages. Here the tide may run no faster than in other tide-races, for example Portland Race, but it is more impressive as off the Pointe du Raz there are huge rocks or islets which, being stationary, enable the eye to take in the contrasting violence of the torrent which pours between them. It is when the stream is setting to the south at seven knots against a contrary wind that the sea in the race is so rough; and in the winter south-westerly gales from the Atlantic the scene must be magnificent. On the other side of the Ile de Sein the dangers if less spectacular are no less real. The tides are very strong, and set directly across the Chaussée de Sein, so that a vessel becalmed or disabled would be driven on the shoals and their countless rocks, against which the sea, even in fine weather, breaks unmercifully.

We 'discovered' the Ile de Sein ourselves for the first time last summer, coming upon it with as much surprise as the early mariners, though we were aided by charts, sailing directions, lighthouses and beacons. We had sailed from the direction of the mainland, through the Raz, and suddenly found ourselves in smooth water with only a moderate tide. To the south of us a low island rose mistily from the sea behind a fringe of islets and rocks. Altering course we passed between two outer rocks, one submerged, the other revealed by the swell breaking over it. We then followed a fishing boat through a channel, and found ourselves among a fleet of fishing boats in a fairy-story anchorage. On that summer's day the sun shone brightly on the





*All Kodachromes by the author*

*Cohoe II, the author's yacht in which he and his family went cruising along the south coast of Brittany. She is seen here in the Bay of Audierne, when about to enter the notoriously dangerous Raz de Sein. Biscay on this occasion is in a calm summer mood, with the yacht pitching to a long glassy swell*





*The harbour of the Ile de Sein. This island, surrounded by numerous rocks, is isolated from the French mainland for long periods in bad weather by dangerous tidal overfalls of the Raz de Sein*

whitewashed lighthouse and the harbour walls.

We landed at the slip by the lifeboat house, at the back of which is a slope with a large church at the top. The town, for it is more than a village, consists of an almost solid block of thick stone-walled houses and cottages separated by narrow, winding alleyways, just wide enough to roll a barrel. It covers the whole half-mile eastern extremity of the island, and is bounded on three sides by the sea. On the west side the buildings cease abruptly, and every inch of the rest of the island, flat and low like Dungeness, is cultivated. It must be one of the most wind-swept places in the world, for each patch of soil in which potatoes, barley, oats and rye are grown, some only a few yards across, has to be protected on all sides by low walls of loose stones. The women till the soil, gather the seaweed to fertilize it, and the men fish. It is astonishing how the tiny island, little more than a large flat rock, supports such a large population. Even nowadays it is sometimes isolated for many days at a time in bad weather, and on occasions an exceptionally violent storm will wash over parts of it. Yet for generations it has been inhabited, and its legendary history goes back into remote anti-

quity. It is believed to have been a burial place of the Druids and on the hill near the church door is an ancient menhir, erected by an even earlier race. The Ile de Sein and its semi-pagan inhabitants had a sinister reputation for wrecking and it was not until the 17th or 18th century that a Jesuit priest landed, and their rapacious instincts were tempered by Christianity. The descendants of these wreckers played a brave part in the Resistance during the last war, and Sein is one of the five communes of France to have received the Croix de la Libération. Today the "Iliens" are a friendly people, but many of the old superstitions handed down from generation to generation still remain. Peter Anson in his interesting book *Mariners of Brittany* refers to their acute awareness of the proximity of the next world, which is reflected in many of the time-honoured customs, and what might almost be called the cult of the dead. We noticed that nearly all the women, young and old, wore sombre black robes and head-dresses, which looked strange in the sun on a bright summer's day. We learnt that they don these widow's weeds for life on the day following the marriage ceremony.

South-east of the Ile de Sein is the somewhat featureless Bay of Audierne, with the



important sardine-fishing port of that name in its north-east corner. At the southern end of the bay lies Penmarch, a low headland, less formidable than Pointe du Raz, as the tides are not so strong, but nevertheless distinctly grim. I have seen little of Penmarch as on the occasion I passed close to it in daytime the weather was rather foggy, and all we saw were the lighthouses and beacons, and a line of rocks rising in a darker grey against a dismal background, on which stands the 197-foot Eckmuhl lighthouse, one of the most powerful in the world. I was astonished to read that in the Middle Ages Penmarch had been one of the most fertile parts of Brittany. It had a good harbour, a large cod and hake industry, and was a prosperous place with wide commercial connexions. The rich district suffered during the Wars of the League, and the discovery of the Newfoundland cod-banks brought severe competition, but final ruin came from a tidal wave which, coinciding with a tremendous gale, destroyed the harbour and flooded the surrounding country.

Ushant, the Chaussée de Sein and Penmarch are places where the Bay of Biscay shows its teeth. Their history is one of maritime disasters and the fight of mankind against the elements, but once the sailor gets

east of Penmarch he comes to a kinder part of the Bay. It may be imagination, but it always seems to me that the climate becomes warmer, and there are innumerable harbours and anchorages near at hand and places worth seeing. There are also many rivers, up which one can sail deep into rural Brittany. Wooded shores, old châteaux, lawns and country scenes are the reward of the salt-encrusted mariner. But, if the sea itself is left behind, its influence is never far away. Here fishermen find their homes on more sheltered shores. In the outer reaches of the rivers tunny-men and large fishing craft find anchorage and everywhere are smaller fishing boats. On each of the rivers, up towards its navigable limit, will be found a town. These towns of southern Brittany have a character of their own. Each is dominated by a cathedral or large church, round which the older part is built, each still preserves a mediaeval appearance and is a centre for the neighbouring district. They are in fact part market-town, part port.

Quimper was the first of these inland ports which we visited. It is approached up the winding course of the lovely river Odet, which flows through deeply wooded country; and its peaceful surroundings are in marked contrast to the featureless plain and severe

*The women of the Ile de Sein wear funereal black from the day after their marriage. A group of them on the quay beside the harbour bargain with a visiting salesman for the cloth he is selling*







*(Above) Many bridges span the river at Quimper where the twin spires of the Cathedral of St Corentin rise above the roofs of the mediaeval town. (Below) The travelling markets lend colour to life in Brittany: the merits of a new gadget for cutting vegetables are being eloquently demonstrated at Etel*







*Near the upper navigable limit of each of the rivers on the south coast of Brittany stands a town, part market-town, part port. The quay near the old gate of St Vincent Ferrier at the entrance to the walled city of Vannes, capital of the department, on the gulf of "Mor Bihan" (inland sea)*

headland of Penmarch, though this is barely fifteen miles away as the crow flies.

The impressions of Quimper left on my mind are the spires of the glorious cathedral of St Corentin rising above the roof-tops, numerous small bridges crossing the river, mediaeval buildings, and cheerful restaurants and shops, many exhibiting the brightly coloured pottery for which the city is famous.

Etel, the next inland town to which we sailed, is not so old and picturesque, but it is an interesting example of one of the smaller provincial towns. Having negotiated the entrance, which like Chichester or Christchurch lies between sand-dunes and has a dangerous bar, we found ourselves on a broad river, with a fast flood-tide. This took us rapidly to the town, which is a mile or two up on the east side. Next morning we went ashore, landing at the quays against which tunnymen were lying, with their lofty fishing rods like antennae stretching far across the road. On the quay is a market, and a single main cobbled street climbs up a hill towards the church. We were lucky as on that day a travelling market was visiting the town. On each side

of the road, round and for a long distance beyond the church, was a line of stalls and booths, where every conceivable kind of merchandise was displayed: clothes, drinks, sweets, ironmongery. At one stall a crowd gathered round an excitable Gaul demonstrating, with magnificent *élan*, the merits of a new kind of vegetable cutter. I do not think I have ever seen a livelier picture than that provided by the gay colours of the stalls and the clothes of the younger women under the brilliant sun, emphasized by the sharply defined shadows of the buildings and the sombre black costumes of the older inhabitants.

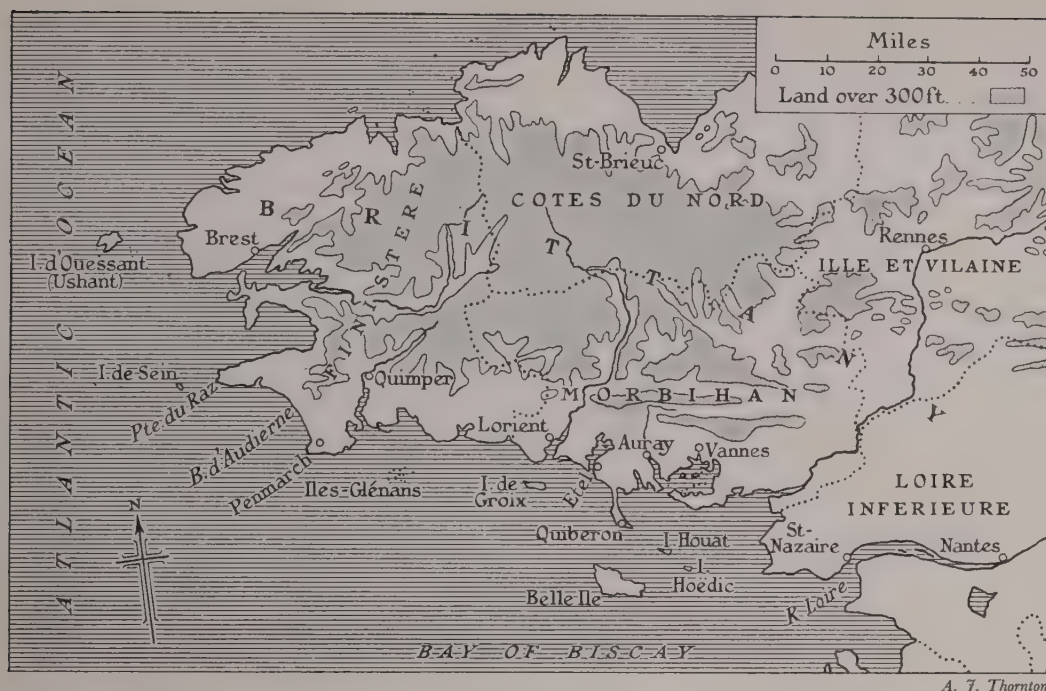
Less than a day's sail from Etel lies the Morbihan; "Mor Bihan" meaning inland sea. This piece of water is comparable with Poole Harbour, but much larger, and lies between rocky shores instead of heathland and mud. The islands are said to be as numerous as there are days in the year. Several rivers or streams flow into the Morbihan, and they are no exception to the rule in Brittany that where one finds a river one also finds a town on its upper reaches. The chart showed that the Auray River, which lies immediately north of





*This might be a view of the skerries of Sweden or Finland, with tree-clad, rocky-shored islands in the background. In reality it is taken looking across the Morbihan from Braunec, one of the smallest of the innumerable tiny islands scattered in this inland sea. The crew landed on Braunec while Cohoc II waited for a fair tide, as the tides here are very strong*





the entrance of the Morbihan, leads up to the tunny-fishing port of Auray, renowned as a centre of pilgrimage throughout Brittany. We had not time to visit it, but were whisked up on the strong tide past island after island, almost as far as Vannes. This ancient walled city is the capital of the Morbihan department. It has a beautiful cathedral and many old buildings, built so closely that the upper windows almost meet those on the other side of the street. The modern public buildings and gardens blend happily with the city walls, which are second only in beauty and state of preservation to those of Carcassonne. A regular ferry service connects Vannes with the neighbouring islands, and at high water ships and fishing boats come right up to the city and lie alongside the quays.

The Morbihan itself is remarkable for the number of menhirs and dolmens to be seen there. We entered in the evening and as we sailed past one of the smaller islets we saw a whole line of menhirs silhouetted against the sunset. The islands of the Morbihan and the surrounding district are littered with these monuments, dating from about 2000 B.C., of a civilization of which Anatole Le Bras writes: "*Elle a pu disparaître sans laisser de nom, cette race inconnue: les pierres dont elle a su manier, mouvoir, planter en rangs symétriques les formidables blocs, demeurent comme les éternels monuments de son passage.*" The

principal islands are Ile aux Moines and the Ile d'Ars, each about a square mile in area, but many of the smaller islands are also inhabited. We anchored off one of the smallest, named Braunec, while awaiting our tide. It was a compact little island about a quarter of a mile long, with a low rocky shore, on which we landed, and found our way up the fern-covered cliff. The top of the island was overgrown with feather grass, bracken, heather and occasional patches of gorse. In the centre were two little pine-woods, in one of which we found a tiny one-roomed cottage. The shutters were broken and it was empty. The scene reminded us very much of Finland. From any part of the island one looked out over the sea to other islands, tree-clad and rocky-shored.

To my mind, however, it is the outer fringe of islands off the coast of Brittany that are the most interesting. The line starts south of Benodet in the Glénan islands, a group of low almost barren islets surrounded by rocks which are marked by beacon-towers or lighthouses. Ile St Nicolas is inhabited, but when I landed in 1947 at Penfret, the most accessible of them, it was deserted but for the lighthouse-keeper. A camp used by a sailing school has recently been established there.

Further east are the larger islands of Ile de Groix and Belle-Ile. These are curiously similar in formation, though Belle-Ile is much





llard Coles

*In the little-known islets of Houat and Hoëdic off the Quiberon Peninsula the church is the centre of the community. (Above) The church on Hoëdic, the smaller island. (Below) Its simple interior: from the blue ceiling, which is decorated with gilt fleurs-de-lis, a painted model ship is suspended*

llard Coles





the larger. They are comparatively high and have magnificent granite coastlines. Each has a good and accessible harbour on the east side, Port Tudy at Groix and Le Palais at Belle-Ile. The men of Ile de Groix were the first to develop tunny-fishing from Brittany, an industry which started in the Bay of Biscay further south at La Rochelle. It is still important and active, the fish being caught far out in the Bay of Biscay. Belle-Ile on the other hand, although it numbers many fishing men in its population, has turned its attention more to the tourist trade, and there is a regular steamer service to Quiberon opposite on the mainland coast.

The island is a great summer resort, and it lives up to its name with its magnificent coastline of rocky headlands, bays and sandy coves. In summer the weather is usually very fine, but we have twice been caught out in gales near Belle-Ile: once in a gale which started with a most violent squall, but was of short duration; the other a long-drawn-out affair in which we had to heave-to for twenty-four hours, with Belle Ile close, but the land out of sight because of the driving rain.

Ile de Groix, Belle-Ile and Quiberon are familiar names in the history of naval warfare and have suffered much at the hands of the Spaniards, Dutch and English. Indeed Belle-Ile has changed owners many times. It was captured in 1761 by Admiral Keppel and returned to France two years later, in exchange for the French colony of Acadie in Canada, many of whose settlers then came over to Belle-Ile.

Between Belle-Ile and the mainland coast lies the strange formation of the Presqu'île de Quiberon, a peninsula about five miles long and one-and-a-half miles wide, joined to the mainland by a sandy neck which at one point is only about a hundred yards across. It is fortified and has been inhabited from prehistoric times. The famous menhirs of Carnac stand halfway between Quiberon and the Morbihan. The same geological formation as Quiberon continues for another twelve miles in the shape of a string of rocks, islets and shoals, between which there are innumerable passages. Of the islets only Houat and Hoëdic are large enough to be inhabited. They are curiously similar, each low and about a square mile in area, and each with a population of about 300, all fisherfolk. Both have small harbours which have been breached by gales. Small, inaccessible and commercially valueless (except for the lobster and crab which abound among the rocky shores) these tiny islands

have a remarkable history. Megalithic monuments and pottery prove that they were inhabited in prehistoric times; later they suffered so much from invasions that the inhabitants fled and did not return to Houat until the 6th and to Hoëdic in the 11th century. Then came Spaniards, Dutchmen and Englishmen to pillage these poverty-stricken fishermen and finally a plague decimated the population. For some generations the islands were lost to official record, and only restored to the map by the Geographical Administrators of France in 1879, after they had been 're-discovered' by an inhabitant of Port Navallo who sailed over the ten miles which separate them from the mainland.

We found good anchorages off both these islands, and spent some time ashore. In each the church is the principal building. The interiors are similar and pleasant in their simplicity: whitewashed walls, blue ceilings, decorated with gilt *fleurs-de-lis*, and in the centre of each a painted ship suspended from the roof. The village of Houat seems the more prosperous of the two and has a small restaurant-hotel, frequented by occasional visitors. Hoëdic is little more than a row or two of cottages, some in ruins, which are built close to the church and village well.

The broken string of islands of Brittany ends with Belle-Ile and Hoëdic, although fifty miles to the south-east is Ile d'Yeu, which is of the same geological formation as Belle-Ile and Ile de Groix. To the south-east of Hoëdic lies the entrance to the Loire: the scene of an exploit perhaps more gallant than any in the turbulent history of these waters. St-Nazaire lies five miles up, on the northern bank of the estuary; and here in March 1942 the Commandos landed. Not only was the port a nest of German submarines: no other available to Hitler on the open Atlantic was capable of sheltering his largest remaining battleship, the *Tirpitz*, then immobilized at Trondheim. The expedition of destroyers and light craft which started at Falmouth passed through waters under constant air and sea patrol from enemy bases in the islands and headlands which I have described. South-east of Belle-Ile there were the intricate off-lying shoals to navigate and then the final approach between the sands that choke the mouth of the Loire, without the aids afforded in peacetime by lighthouses and lightbuoys. Early on that spring morning the old destroyer *Campbeltown* was driven against the great lock-gates and scuttled. When the three tons of high explosive in her bows blew up next day, the port was effectively blocked.



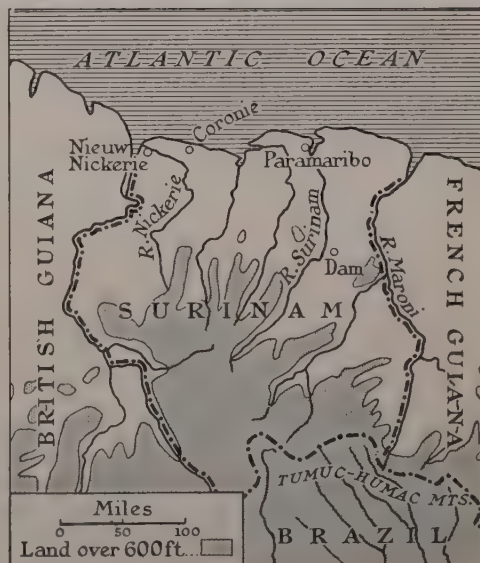
# Surinam

by WILLEM VAN DE POLL



photographs by the author, from Black Star Ltd

(Above) Paramaribo, capital of the Dutch colony of Surinam, stands on the broad river of the same name. Nearly all its houses are built of wood; the few brick ones are either comparatively modern or else date from the 18th century. The traders and colonists of the Dutch West India Company first settled in the land when, by the Treaty of Breda in 1667, England ceded part of what is now Surinam to the Netherlands in exchange for territory around New York and the Hudson River. The Dutch laid out plantations along the coast; but they found that tilling the soil in a hot, humid climate was so exhausting that labourers born and bred in the tropics were essential. The native South American Indians were, however, unsuited to the work and people had to be brought from tropical countries elsewhere, first from Africa and later from Java and India, for this purpose



A. J. Thornton



*About half of Surinam's present population of 200,000 are descended from African slaves. Some of the older Creole women still wear the traditional koto-missie (koto meaning coat or dress, missie meaning lady)*











(Opposite) Pupils in front of a school run by the Evangelical Mission in Coronie, about eighty miles west of the capital. That there is no racial prejudice can be seen from the photograph (above) of the kindergarten class. (Right) A Creole girl, characteristically cheerful and good-natured. In Surinam the descendants of freed slaves are called Creoles, as distinct from the "Bush Negroes" who are descended from runaway slaves who fled to the interior, reverting to a primitive life

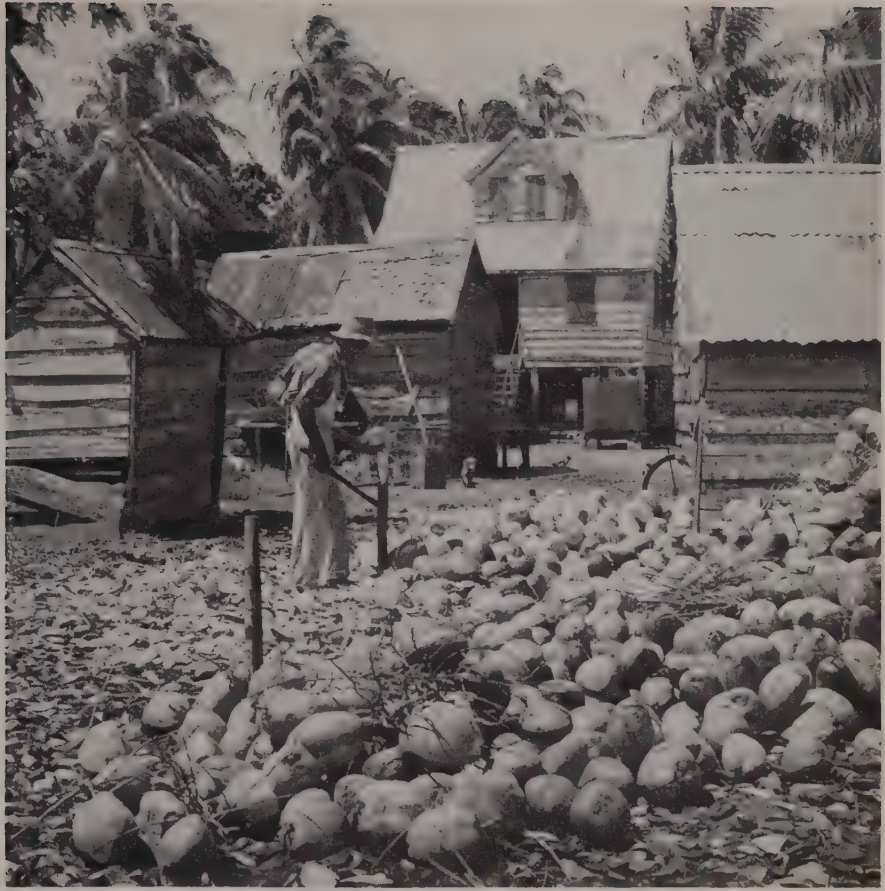






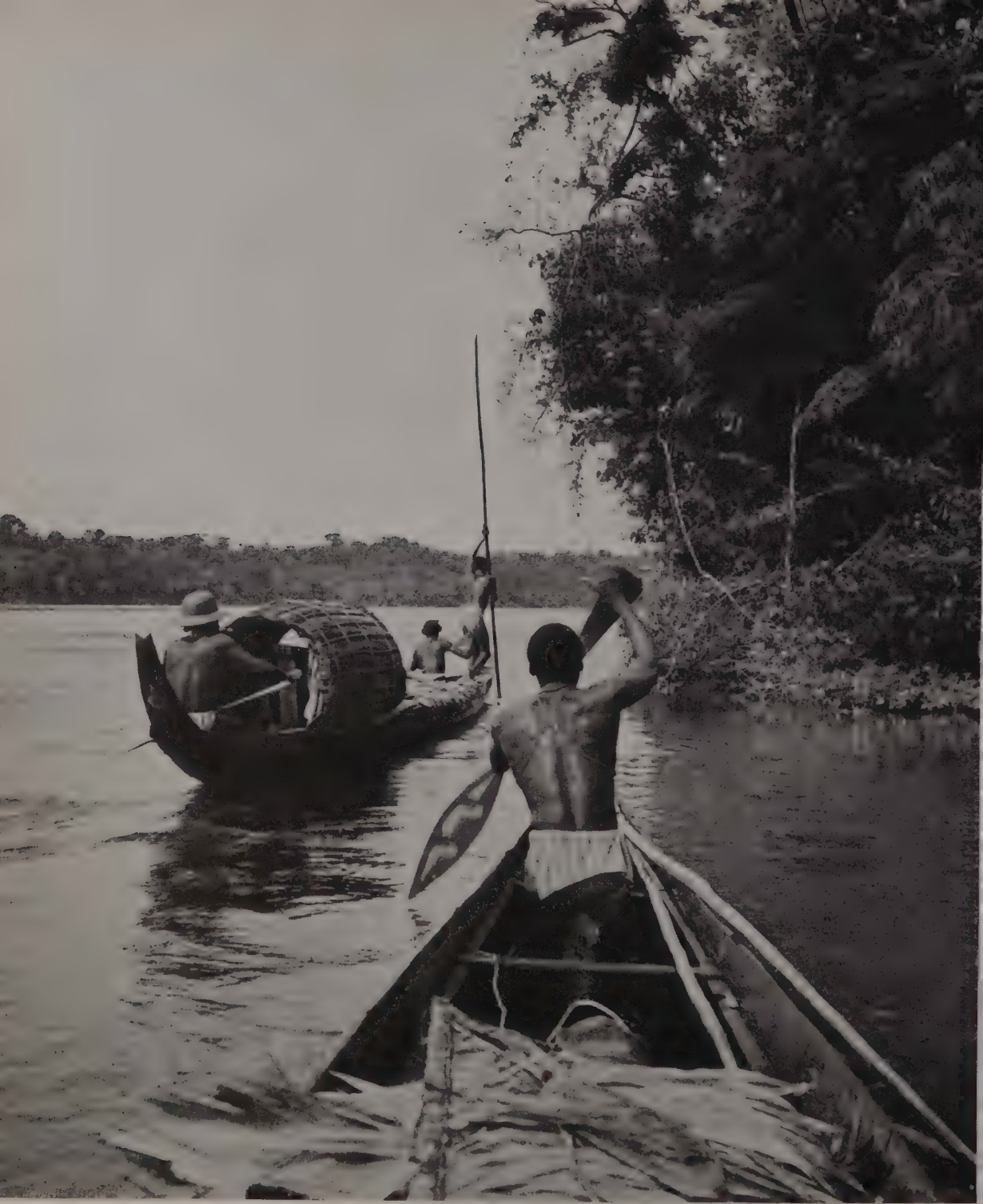
(Above) Near Nieuw Nickerie, in the extreme west of Surinam: a Dutch colonial-style house in a tropical setting. Dutch influence, especially evident hereabouts, appears also in the dykes and polders by which hydraulic engineers have fitted the land for cultivation, though only a small area—about 150 square miles—of the fertile coast is thus developed, the principal crops being coffee, sugar and rice. The last is largely grown by the Javanese and Hindus whose forbears were brought to Surinam to provide the labour necessary after the freeing of the slaves in 1863. (Right) A Javanese woman planting rice.





Although bauxite and alluvial gold are Surinam's most valuable exports agriculture supports most of the population. In the Coronie district (above) coconuts are the main product. Their cultivation and processing are carried out on a small scale by Creoles using primitive equipment. (Left) The tropical forests, in addition to hardwoods, yield a form of rubber called balata. The "bleeders" or collectors, working independently, haphazardly tap the milk-white juice from the trees growing wild in the jungle and bring back the balata in the form of mats for which they are paid by weight





*The settlements and trading posts of the Bush Negroes in the interior of Surinam are only accessible along the rivers and their canoes the only form of transport. Thirty feet or more in length, these are hewn from single tree-trunks and the Bush Negroes handle them with great skill in the dangerous currents*



*(Above) Bush Negroes enjoy considerable independence and choose their own chiefs or "Captains" who are recognized by the government. On gala occasions they don old uniforms ranging from a militiaman's to a tram-driver's. (Below) Captains of the future, in everyday dress, play their own version of football*





# My Worst Journey—V

by FREYA STARK

*In the previous articles of this series, some of our more distinguished contributors have placed their memorably abhorrent journeys in scales of badness which they have chosen for themselves. Miss Stark, undismayed by the many bad moments of her far-ranging travels in Persia and Arabia, finds herself impelled to choose one quite different sort of journey as being very much her worst*

WHEN I was asked to write about my “worst journey”, I looked back over what is now a varied collection of adventures and was perplexed to find nothing in it that one might consider definitely bad. There are days in every journey when everything goes wrong: to be weatherbound in some snug place unknown to all your friends and even—you may hope—to Destiny itself, is one of the cosiest experiences in the world; but to be caught by weather in the open, or at the wrong moment, or with sickness as an added complication, is as unpleasant as anything external can be. And nearly every journey has some such days or hours. There is in fact almost always a moment when you wonder with amazement why you ever set out at all. You have left your props behind you, all the furniture of your life, the barricade of things and people erected by yourself and your forbears against the attacks of circumstance; and Circumstance is now all about you, with pinprick or stiletto as the case may be; and nothing but your self to pit against it—for even the best of guides or hosts or friends you may have collected are new and unsettled in your ways, and if your own inner power gives out they too are bound to fail. It is, I think, the fear of one’s own exhaustion that makes the bad moment of the journey—with the knowledge that nothing is there to supplement your own resources if they give way.

In these moments, the best thing to do if one can is to sleep. When I was a child, I used to think of my bed as an island of safety; the dangerous shadows that lurked—especially around the corners of the bedroom—were there, by some mysterious power, kept at bay; and my camp bed has retained this sort of magic, and often receives me in a little rectangle of peace when chaos threatens all around.

But there is one place where even this refuge fails and the privacy of one’s bunk is merely one more cell in a whole system of misery. This is the Atlantic under what the stewardess will tell you—with that hard brisk cheerful air—is merely “a bit of a breeze”.

One should, I think, be ready to pay for one’s pleasures, and I could bear the horror, if the Atlantic in its happier moments seemed to me worth anything at all. But let us face the fact: except in the eyes of a few fanatics (untrustworthy as all lovers) an unmitigated expanse of water is dull even when blue: not in a small boat, where you are a part of the winds and currents and tides and are allowed to hold the tiller now and then; but from those decks which the shipping companies with subconscious insight try to make as suburban as possible so that the impact of the monster outside may be lessened, and where the unrecognized boredom is so deep that a wispy smear of smoke on the horizon will queue up a crowd as if for a Valkyrie passing.

This gives the measure of the Atlantic when kind—and when unkind, who can assess it? I look back over all the bad hours it has given me—its freezing coldness, its instability, its nauseating whiffs of oil from the engine-room and smell of paint in the bath-room, its horrid way of making the bath-water slant, so that one feels that something in the laws of gravity has gone askew; above all its efforts at entertaining, like a virago’s smile with no kindness beneath it—deck tennis and sweepstakes for all, and the officers’ attentions turned on like switches; until one wonders whether any of the other big fish swimming about around us out of sight carry as much dreariness inside them as we do. Nor is the recipe I am always being given against boredom of any use to me at all. One should study one’s fellow passengers, they say: a fatal thing to do if one feels as I always feel on an Atlantic crossing.

I have faced the northern ocean five times and the last time was the worst, and I feel that I can choose it without a runner-up for my worst journey. It was in 1943, the middle of the war, and November. Because I am an optimist, in spite of past experience, a faint, doubtful glamour hung about the thought of the convoy gathering in the North, as I rattled up in a pleasantly and unusually warm sleeper from King’s Cross. I had been in two convoys

twice through the Red Sea, and what with islands in sight, and aeroplanes—some friendly and others not—and warm weather and a boat too small for deck drill, the time had gone pleasantly. And Glasgow gave us one of those soft mild winter days, with an illusion of spring round the corner, with the Clyde lying grey as a kitten curled in mists, the woods of its headlands soft as water, and its open basins pale and bright as sky.

There, in an open but noticeably secret solitude, the convoy was gathered, steamless shapes sheltered from sight by the hills. Out of the special train which took us from Glasgow to our unnamed destination, we were piloted and embarked on the *Aquitania*. A last little halo of luxury surrounded the name in our imaginations, as we climbed up the side: and then we were shown our quarters, and illusions vanished.

The ship was 'stripped' of course; she was carrying, we were told, five thousand British troops—to America—to the Pacific beyond—who knows? But there they were, with their hammocks slung deck below deck in view when we went down for meals, in air which—compared to the pleasant openness of a Beduin tent—seemed to me unbreathable, packed so close together that some of them must surely think now and then how a bomb here and there is not so undesirable if it makes a little more room on the planet? They were admirably cheerful, and filled our only saloon with a sort of collective haze, a turmoil in which individuals vanished and only Khaki wreathed in tobacco smoke and punctuated with faces seemed to exist with an amorphous, temporary life. Over their heads, cleared now and then by the eddies of the smoke, the *Aquitania's* luxury ceiling appeared and hid itself; and it was this sight of former splendour under the stripping, a gilt bracket, a tattered skirting, a bit of painted doorway gone dark with unwashed touches, that gave us our atmosphere of squalor: a clean bare boarded room would have been clear of this nostalgia of decay.

There were a few women, nearly all with babies, who seemed (by the carefulness of his instructions) to weigh heavily on our captain's mind; at all costs infants are sheltered to grow up for another war. Their pink little faces wrapped in shawls were inured twice a day to deck drill, with kind officers helping mothers to arrange the cork jackets for two. The Atlantic howled by in its usual gruesome and useless hurry, putty-green flecked with white. The seagulls made sudden dips sideways, their round eyes fixed on food. The day

rolled low in the sky from squall to squall. After an hour or so of standing about, thinking perforce of shipwrecks, the fug in the saloon was quite welcome.

A little cabin for one person had been arranged to hold four of us women bound for the U.S.A. Here we could lie on our bunks and read in an atmosphere of friendliness and comparative privacy; for we soon discovered that it is *people* who are the chief bane of the collective life. Our little oasis looked like a slum, with all we needed for six days or seven hung out on various strings; but the heart of it was sound, with great helpfulness and kindness inside it; and its worst irritations were the luxury gadgets made for a single occupant, which uselessly used up valuable room, and the thin threads of icy Atlantic air that seemed, like ghosts, to pass through solid metal, for the darkened porthole was battened down from seven at night to seven in the morning, for fear of submarines.

We were, we soon discovered, not in convoy at all. The *Aquitania* was so big and so strong that she could do better by herself and relied on secrecy and swiftness to get her across. Like a greyhound through grass, or the Poet's words through the generations of men, she sped day and night with her strong thudding heart, and those dismal Atlantic waves flattened themselves against her, with their sodden possibilities of death inside them. How is it possible, I thought, that people ever cross this detestable ocean for *pleasure*? For three days, morning and afternoon, the siren hooted and we took our cork jackets, that filled up half our cabin, on deck, and the inhabitants of each boat began to form a pattern that recognized itself, and the sea—as we came towards its middle fastnesses—stretched its waves into long wizened sinews and even its foam seemed grey like the storm-clouds above.

On the third or the fourth day out, I cannot remember which, I developed acute appendicitis. I was not told what it was, but the pain was so violent that the doctor came, and looked at me with a blank young face of panic inspired, I thought, merely by the awfulness of having to deal with a woman in this world of men—for the ship's hospital was full, and there were no nurses but only orderlies about. The one stewardess, her time already overfull of mothers and babies, looked compassionate but remote. They gave me what I was afterwards told was M. & B., and explained that I had a gastric cold; I was exonerated from boat drill and had the relief of thinking that, if necessary, I could now drown in a quiet in-



dependent way by myself. For the next three days I lay in my bunk, fed by kind companions with such few things as are suitable for appendicitis out of the menu of a troopship in war. I had books; and the horizon kept itself quiet below the circle of the porthole: but the weary nights dragged minute by minute in an almost intolerable absence of air, interspersed with icy intervals down the long dim clanking corridors of metal, groaning and straining as they pulled us through the sea. How I longed for seven o'clock and the opening of the porthole, and the sight of the sullen, wind-ripped grey! And lifting myself to look out over the sunless ridges, I tried to remember the existence of the blue Mediterranean, the little journeys from harbour to harbour in ancient grooves, the well-worn Graeco-Roman world. When we berthed in Halifax, late on the fourth evening of my illness, I felt suddenly as if nothing could keep me alive through another night of this captivity; the doctor, increasingly worried, evidently felt about it as I did, and at eleven at night I was tucked up on a stretcher in blankets and lifted down a gangway onto land.

The five thousand troops must have thought that some pampered general was being allowed ashore while they were battered down for another set of hours almost as uncomfortable as mine. Tier above tier up the huge ship's side their dim crowding faces lined the narrow slits of decks as they leaned out with whistles and cat-calls of annoyance; until, in a slanting drizzle, preceded by a small lantern and with four men carrying the stretcher, my small self appeared like the

funeral of Sir John Moore at Corunna, surrounded by darkness and rain. A complete silence fell on the five thousand while they looked down and I looked up, and the stretcher bearers stumbled along; and the immense smooth flank of the *Aquitania* seemed to lift itself out of sight into the starless region of the elements where she belonged. But I was now on a pleasantly quiescent cobbled street; lifted into an ambulance; transported to an infirmary; unwrapped by a kind and soothing nun and put into a four-legged bed with sheets that could tuck in. Little I cared now for what happened to me.

When the surgeon came in the morning, I was operated on at two hours' notice, and as the appendix had meanwhile already broken, the chances of success seemed small. But I passed through it all without a hitch, and was walking in a fortnight, and travelling to New York in three weeks or four. This remarkable result, which—I learned afterwards—surprised everyone except myself who knew nothing about it, was due in the first place to the skilled surgery and devoted nursing which I think of with gratitude often; but in the second place I think it was also due to the unsurpassable unpleasantness of the Atlantic, which inspires a philosophic and placid acceptance of any other trial—the best psychological preparation for operations of any kind. And this proves, too, what I wrote at the beginning of this article, that no journey can be called wholly bad or good; since nothing but the monstrous wetness of the Atlantic can inspire that passionate relief and rejoicing in the mere dryness of land when it appears.



# The South Italian Fund

by SYLVIA SPRIGGE

*In Italy, as in other countries, politics have a geographical background; nowhere is a knowledge of this more necessary to their interpretation. The author, who was for over twelve years Rome Correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, indicates the geographical pivot of Italian politics and describes one of the instruments designed to promote change while avoiding violent revolution*

No nation can permanently live with a "poor South". The United States' "poor South" has seen the abolition of slavery and the rise of famous and great new cities during the last hundred years or so after a long struggle and much military and civil activity. The "poor South" of France has seen the rise of a great tourist industry, of ports and shipbuilding yards, during the last hundred years. Examples can be multiplied. Russia has to some extent planned out its great "distressed area" of Turkestan with new cotton fields and textile plants, while the discovery of oil in Baku helped to relieve the poverty of Transcaucasia. But Italy, united Italy which is not yet one hundred years old, has a tremendously poor southern region which begins just east of Rome and stretches right down to the heel and toe of the peninsula and includes Sicily, Sardinia and the many little archipelagos dotted round the indented coasts. For centuries the coastal regions of this great area, in which today nearly 37 per cent of Italy's 47,000,000 inhabitants live, have been the goal of invaders and settlers. The Greeks found them so beautiful that they settled there in the 5th century B.C. and called their new cities of Croton, Sybaris, Metapontum, Palinurus, Poseidonia, Neapolis, Syracuse and Agrigento (and many others) Greater Greece. The Saracens were frequent invaders. The Normans established a kingdom in Sicily, and centuries later the Angevins came south by land, the Spaniards came across by sea, and finally Garibaldi and his Thousand liberated Sicily in 1859 and crossed over to the southern mainland winning supporters to the cause of United Italy wherever he fought.

Unless these many invasions and foreign rules, some of which lasted a century and more, are remembered, the character of the Southern Italians and their present great difficulties can hardly be understood. Centuries of foreign rule, whether by Austrians, Spaniards, Frenchmen or even Englishmen (in Sicily in 1812) created a peculiar resistance to all government, a kind of private and secret local rule which has its legacy today in 1954 in the

still powerful "Mafia" in Sicily, and the more localized "Camorra" in Naples. Among the less harassed, philosophy and law tend to become the chief objects of study, and most of Italy's great philosophers and lawyers are Southerners. Very ancient customs and rites abound, if only because few rulers stayed long enough to introduce new ones, and superstition in all forms is strong in these areas, especially where no good roads have yet penetrated, and visitors are few.

To some of us who know Italy well, the South and its people remain an example of how the human being can survive much hardship and remain tolerant, kind, and full of vitality. The land has been Christian well-nigh 2000 years. The setting of this scene is still immensely beautiful, despite the depredations of successive rulers who hacked down forest after forest to make their ships and build their palaces. But Nature has not been kind in the supply of water—many thousands of women have never had any other washtub than the local stream—and deforestation has added the bane of erosion. Where trees are continually cut down without replanting, dust-bowls begin, and during severe rainfalls the great and disastrous landslides of Calabria, which have been in the news two years running, cause heavy damage and loss of life in the valleys below. There are not enough trees in the highlands to hold the soil on many of the western and eastern slopes of the Southern Apennines, which run right down to the toe of Italy and end in the great Sila plateau. In the Abruzzi, fifty miles east of Rome, the bare Apennines look so strange and grey and rugged behind the spring blossom of thousands of apricot and peach trees, that travellers here have sometimes called them the mountains of the moon.

The "Cassa del Mezzogiorno", with its ten-year plan for Southern Italy, was founded by law in March 1950, but it is by no means the first attempt of United Italy to deal with its great Southern problem. In the first fine rapture of the Italian Risorgimento, when every reform seemed desirable by the makers of the new



Italy (Cavour, Garibaldi, Mazzini and their associates), a single legislation for the whole land was the practice, regardless of differing conditions in the rich North and the poor South. Among the evils which the makers of modern Italy were determined to abolish was the Church and Feudal "dead hand" or *mano morta* (mortmain) land tenure system. All feudal forms of land tenure were to be abolished, but especially this one, which bestowed completely inalienable and unchangeable property rights, free of taxation, and not transferable or inheritable by any "vassal" or peasant. It is a sad epitaph on those high hopes of the Risorgimento that today in Italy there are still many mortmain land tenures, and that vast estates are continually being bought up by the Church's orders, which apparently pay no land tax and are exempt from any of the new great Land Reform schemes. A land that produces as many lawyers as Italy does, seems to have the greatest freedom and desire to put laws on the statute book, but the application of these laws very often remains a dead letter. Nevertheless in the last thirty years of the last century a great deal of land did change hands, and many Church lands (which of course were immense in the former Papal States) were confiscated and distributed among the new and growing middle classes. In the great haste, extraordinary things happened, especially in Sicily. A Parliamentary enquiry in Sicily in 1885, for instance, revealed that nearly half a million acres there had changed hands in the break-up of the great feudal estates, but that 52 per cent of this land had simply gone towards the enlargement of already extensive properties, 41 per cent towards the enlargement of medium properties and only 7 per cent to new small owners. Barely fifty years later, today, the same situation is arising. Once again in Southern Italy the *latifundia* (great estates) are under legislative fire; once again the landlords—so often absentee—are furious and anxious by all possible means to avert confiscation, and once again (as we shall see later) the same thing might most easily happen. The Cassa del Mezzogiorno is one of the chief instruments designed to prevent this.

A personal family stake in the land for the peasant is perhaps the most important social reform which present-day governments can introduce in agricultural nations. Between the two World Wars, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia divided up among the peasants the great properties left by the Austro-Hungarian feudal landlords. After the French Revolution the French peasant received his

land, and perhaps this fact explains why governments may rise and fall in France with uncommon frequency, but the life of the country goes steadily on, whereas when governments fall in Italy, the anxiety is considerable, and not only inside Italy. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were 'liberated' in the last war by armies of a country which believes in collective farming, so that private holdings were for the time being abolished. But they are returning in Yugoslavia and will surely return in Czechoslovakia.

Italians farm their land in families. Three generations can often be seen at work in a field. Collective farms offer no attractions, but cooperatively owned tractors which are too expensive to buy for one family are a feature of Italy's new Land Reform. With ceremony and some solemnity the government distribution of these tractors takes place once or twice a year in the new Land Reform areas, and anyone who has witnessed these occasions in the Fucino basin (in the Abruzzi east of Rome) or on the Sila plateau, or in the Tuscan seaboard or Maremma, will not easily forget them. Tractors, with the various ploughs, hoes and rollers, seed distributors and harvesters which they tow, are quite indispensable in the wide tracts of Basilicata, where cultivation by families simply would not cover the ground in time. Over 4000 have already been distributed in Southern Italy since the war. The plan of the Cassa del Mezzogiorno envisages the distribution of some 30,000 by 1960.

The reason why much Italian legislation about the land in the last century failed to work was undoubtedly the absence of capital investment in roads, waterways and agricultural machinery, not to mention houses and transport. It was useless to break up the great estates if no peasant could be found who could afford to work the land which became available. So grave was the situation for the Southern peasant after the unification of Italy that he began to emigrate on an unprecedented scale. Between 1900 and 1910 no less than 400,000 Italians emigrated every year to the United States and South America, and the vast majority of these emigrants came from Southern Italy and the islands. Altogether there are nearly 10,000,000 people of Italian origin in the Americas. Inevitably some did not 'make good', and among the names of Chicago's worst gangsters are many Italian ones. But the majority settled well in the new lands and sent home remittances which, during the first half of this century, formed one of the chief 'invisible exports' of Italy. Emigra-



*All photographs, except one, by Almas, from B.I.*

*Under a Ten-Year Plan launched in 1950 the Cassa del Mezzogiorno is attempting to redress the economic balance between Italy's poor South (the "Mezzogiorno") and her far wealthier North. The Cassa's expenditure is closely linked with Land Reform schemes under which landless peasants receive not only small-holdings but also tractors and other modern equipment so that they may be worked efficiently. Here the director of a Land Reform tractor centre in the Sila region of Calabria is being emphatically notified of a local farmer's requirements*





*The Sila plateau is one of the places where the Cassa is enabling land to be settled and developed. Formerly difficult of access and largely uncultivated, it is now growing potatoes and wheat, while experiments are being made with fruit trees and a variety of other crops. Its single major road is being supplemented by a light railway. In the background is seen a reservoir whose water will be used in hydro-electric projects*

*In contrast to the land that is only now being reclaimed, much of the land on the large, neglected Southern estates is traditionally given over to extensive wheat cultivation. The work on them is done by day-labourers, who at harvest time bring in their families too. Most of the harvest is still gathered and transported, as of old, by hand and ox-cart; and the help of the Cassa in providing agricultural machinery is badly needed*





*Parts of the South are very dry and stony and water is needed for irrigation. In others such rivers as the Tacina, while affording the only washtub for many thousands of women, are so irregular in flow that they dry up in summer but in winter become fierce torrents, causing destructive floods and landslides*





*To improve and conserve water supplies, the Cassa is spending large sums on "hydraulic systematization", as in the mountain basin of the Calabrian river Neto; these works being combined with reafforestation, hydro-electric installations, bridges and new roads—an urgent need in the poorly provided South*



Basta coi Sabotaggi! Basta coi Sabotaggi!



One of Southern Italy's unemployed. Past promises have seldom come to anything; now he is sceptical of them, as well he may be, seeing that opposition to Land Reform and other schemes for his welfare comes both from landlords fearful of being dispossessed and from Communists seeking to bring about a 'revolutionary situation'. Posters behind him indict Communist sabotage of reconstruction: to combat apathy born of scepticism is essential to the success of development plans

tion virtually ceased when the United States decided to cut down its immigration quotas in the 1920s. Today remittances from emigrants are beginning to dwindle. The third generation will send still less home, so that the need for Italy to help itself in the South, rather than to rely on dollar remittances, becomes even more urgent. Many of the emigrants came back in old age, and there are few villages in Southern Italy today where English is not understood by some old peasant who is fetched when an English-speaking traveller arrives. This too explains why American Government help has been so generous to Italy since the war in Marshall Aid and in the Cassa del Mezzogiorno.

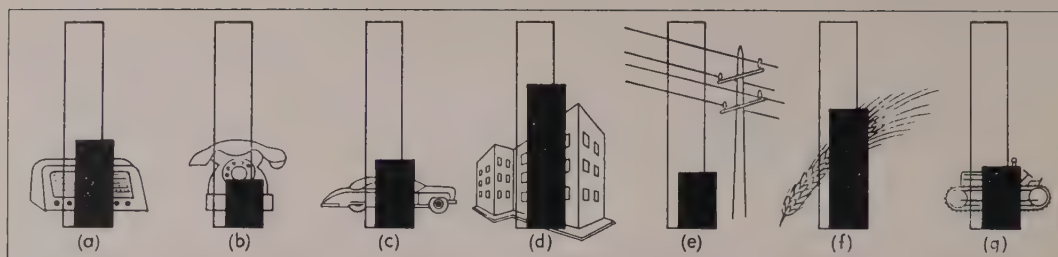
The end of emigration possibilities coincided in Italy with the rise of Mussolini and the Fascist Dictatorship. It too was faced with the problem of Southern Italy and it would be useless to deny that Fascism scattered some excellent roads over Southern Italy and set up some model villages upon them. But it never penetrated deep into the South. Its works there (and elsewhere in Italy) are public, big, obvious: built, one might say, propaganda-wise, for all to see. The town and port of Bari were greatly enlarged by Mussolini's regime and always shown as a model of what he did for the South. The truth is that Mussolini hoped to solve the poverty and overpopulation of Southern Italy in quite another way. He believed he could build an Italian empire in Abyssinia, Libya, Eritrea and Somaliland and settle it with Southern Italian peasants. He did settle 10,000 families of Southern Italian peasants in Cyrenaica, equipping them with all the necessary tools, with farmsteads and barns, seeds and tractors. Recent visitors to this once-flourishing area on the north coast of Africa say that the Senussi Arabs have not taken over the farms and that much of the land has just gone to seed and is returning to desert. Former settlers, who have returned from Africa, and their grown-up children are a part of the immense crowds one sees, idle, round the village fountain in so many Southern Italian and Sicilian places. Mussolini's dream was practicable until it involved war with Abyssinia and eventually war against Britain, America, and half the world. Then it ended in a gigantic defeat in which once again Southern Italy has been reduced to extreme poverty and Sardinia and Sicily have seen a recrudescence of the banditry which great poverty brings.

The heritage of this disaster, which brought the armies of far greater and stronger nations

than Italy right onto Italian soil, fighting inch by inch up the peninsula, was the destruction of hundreds of thousands of houses round Naples and Cassino and all the way up to Rome; the port of Naples was a shambles, Bari, Taranto and Brindisi shipyards were full of wrecks, almost every railway bridge and tunnel was blown up and 80 per cent of all Italy's rolling stock was burnt out by bombing or in the fighting. Four-fifths of the Italian merchant navy was at the bottom of the sea, and the Southern (and the Northern) peasant had no means of transporting the grapes and peaches and vegetables which form a major part of Italy's foreign exports. British and American aid in the United Nations Relief Administration fed the population for a time. Raw materials came with Marshall Aid and recovery was said to be the fastest in Europe. Certainly by 1950 a great deal of the damage had been repaired, but the South remained the problem it has ever been. In their despair the Southerners were drifting northwards, so that today towns like Milan and Rome have each at least 300,000 new inhabitants whose place of birth is the far South. They camp in hand-made houses built out of old petrol-cans, bits of wood and broken bricks on the edge of the great cities. Rome alone has 123 such encampments, newly made since the war, with no proper lighting or drainage. These are places where vice, thieving and worse, easily flourishes. Only redistribution of the land, new industries, houses, roads, and above all aqueducts in the South can stop this drift northwards. Those who are left behind grow impatient. Only three months ago (on January 8, 1954) at Leonessa near Rieti the peasants stormed the town hall with hard snowballs, broke its windows and ransacked the offices. The reason given was that they had sent a delegation to the Mayor which had not returned, asking for "an aqueduct which had been promised ten years ago". Every month the little local papers in Southern Italy record such events. Years ago the peasants bore it in silence, or emigrated, or joined the militia, or were shipped to Libya. Today the peasants are being organized by all the political parties, but most efficiently by the Communist party (which scored 9,000,000 votes in the last General Election in Italy out of a total of 24,000,000 cast). Newspapers cover the region, the wireless is beginning to arrive, television will take time though it has reached Rome this year. Since 1952 every village has a telephone and the peasant is becoming vocal.

In fact, the race is now on between recon-





Almasy, from B.I.P.S.

This diagram shows some of the differences between the standard of life in the North of Italy and that in the South. The white column represents the North; the black, Mezzogiorno. The figures for (a) to (e) are per 1000 inhabitants. (a) Number of radios: North 84, South 35; (b) number of telephone subscribers: North 27, South 6; (c) number of private cars: North 8, South 2.5; (d) number of rooms occupied by 1000 people: North 880, South 580; (e) consumption of electricity: North 100,000 kilowatts, South 26,000 kw; (f) productiveness of the soil per hectare (2.47 acres): North £72, South £42; (g) number of tractors per 1000 hectares of cultivated land: North 7, South 2

struction and revolution. One cannot but hope and believe that the first will win against the second, but the risk of the second must not be underestimated. If the first wins then the Cassa del Mezzogiorno will enjoy a great deal of the credit. For this is the plan of the Cassa as it was worked out by Italian and American experts and passed by Chamber and Senate on March 27, 1950:

The Southern Italian Fund provides for a ten-year plan to be completed by 1960 during which 1,000,000,000,000 lire (or £600,000,000) are to be spent as follows in Central and Southern Italy:

|   | Millions<br>of Lire |
|---|---------------------|
| A. Land Improvement and Reclamation:  |                     |
| Improvements, irrigation and state contributions to existing property                     | 440,000             |
| Public works in hill and mountain regions, such as reafforestation                        | 50,000              |
| Public works connected with Land Reform and agricultural mechanization, canning, etc.     | 280,000             |
|   | 770,000             |
| B. Aqueducts  | 110,000             |
| C. Roads  | 90,000              |
| D. Tourism (new hotels, access to them, winter sports facilities, fairs, festivals, etc.) | 30,000              |
| Total   | 1,000,000           |

The area included in the Cassa del Mezzogiorno's plan covers no less than 3,500,000 hectares or 11,500,000 acres and within ten years it is hoped to treble the productivity of Southern Italy and the islands and to quad-

ruple the available work; or to quote the plan, "to assure a better distribution of the Italian population", and to stem the drift to the North.

This is clearly a vast programme. Are there sufficient funds, and is there skilled and honest personnel capable of using these great funds for the purposes to which they have been allotted?

The main burden of this great expenditure must come from the Italian exchequer and therefore from the Italian taxpayer, either in indirect taxes (on tobacco, entertainments, customs and excise, purchase tax, etc.) or from direct income taxation. People in France and Italy dodge taxes far more than in Britain. A big tax reform has been introduced by the Christian Democrat governors of Italy since the war (the Vanoni reform) which has involved the declaration and publication of all taxable incomes above 100,000 lire or £60 a year. On its success—and it is mild enough by British standards for 7 per cent is about the average tax to be paid—depends the provision of these funds for the Cassa. Only time and internal peace and confidence in the government will show whether the Vanoni Tax Reform is working well. The Italian Exchequer had to contribute the following sums until this year to the Cassa:

|         |                     |
|---------|---------------------|
| 1950-51 | 42,600,000,000 lire |
| 1951-52 | 50,000,000,000 lire |
| 1952-53 | 60,000,000,000 lire |

and thereafter 10,000,000,000 lire more each year until 1960.

The rest, for the time being, comes from America in the shape of E.R.P. (European Reconstruction Plan) aid, and from an ac-

count called the "Fondo Lire", into which, since the war, the Italian Government has been paying all the lire it has realized by the sale of American-sent raw materials and machinery. Moreover, a special loan of \$10,000,000 has been given by the International Bank, with the promise of further loans if the Cassa's work proceeds well. It is presumed that the returns from the new Tax Reform and the return on the new Southern schemes will finance the rest.

Finance is not, at the moment, the chief problem. Personnel is. Italy's skilled surveyors, foresters, architects and sanitary in-

spectors are being invited under the Ten-Year Plan to compete for 100 yearly scholarships which include special study of the plan and seven months' local residence on the sites for practical training. There is a queue for these jobs. But where the whole plan may break down, and where it has already occasioned the resignation of some well-known agricultural experts, is in honest administration. This is hard to come by, for reasons which will be obvious from this brief survey of the past history of the area. The temptation to drain off the funds in unnecessary payments, in graft, in favouritism or merely in slipshod account-







By courtesy of the Italian State Tourist Department

*La Martella, one of the three new villages built or being constructed in Basilicata under the auspices of the Cassa del Mezzogiorno, in order to rehouse people from the cave-slums of Matera*

ing has to be met, or the moneys will gradually vanish away.

Finally there is one other big question-mark. The Cassa del Mezzogiorno's Ten-Year Plan is closely bound up with Signor de Gasperi's Land Reform. Here is what Italy's retiring Prime Minister Signor Pella (Treasury Minister under successive de Gasperi Governments since the war) writes about this in the volume *Lo Sviluppo dell'Economia Italiana* (page 192) published by the Stationery Office in Rome :

The coordination of the ten-year development plan with land reform is essential. To that end a whole series of concrete projects applying to the (southern) areas have been lifted out of the National Land Reform. They apply to areas of extensive agriculture where almost always a precarious and irregular distribution of property exists, and where wider yields and increased production are envisaged under a better distribution of property.

This brings us to the very heart of one of the main controversies in Italian life and affairs today. Because of this the last Pella

Government fell in January this year, for the landlords wanted him to appoint a new Minister of Agriculture who would gradually whittle down the Land Reform until, as they hope, it will no longer be applied. If it is not, then the Cassa's work will be restricted to aqueducts and roads, to factories and electricity plants, and the human problem of these great unemployed masses in Southern Italy will be left unsolved. Then indeed the danger of revolution will come near.

The Cassa's work is being pushed forward and in the first two years of its life new villages may be seen on former expropriated estates near Matera, near San Giovanni in Fiore and near Melissa. This latter place was the centre of many Communist-led excursions by the peasants with banners, picks and shovels to stake a claim to the land, whatever the cost in life and limb. Lives were lost there (and elsewhere) in 1947 in clashes between the police and the peasants. The plan is very big. It is still too early to speak of results, but so much is at stake that one must hope that success will attend it.

# Newtown: “The Leeds of Wales”

by H. DENNIS JONES

As far as the passer-by is concerned Newtown, in Montgomeryshire, is a place that one simply passes by. In this it is something of a rarity, for a man must be a very dull-witted traveller indeed if he does not bestow at least a casual glance on every bit of scenery, rural and urban alike, as he passes by. Newtown, however, ensconced in its loop of the fast-flowing Severn, is so sited as to evade even glances that are more than casual. The main road to Aberystwyth and the west coast of Wales merely skirts the town. So does the railway. The station is barely distinguishable from any other halt on the line from Shrewsbury, and certainly gives you no hint that it belongs to a town whose woollen manufactures were once mentioned in the same breath as those of Bradford, Rochdale, Halifax and Leeds.

But for the vagaries of the wartime War Office I should, I confess, never have dreamt of setting foot in Newtown. But one day in 1942, after weeks spent peeling potatoes in Bradford, I was suddenly ordered to Newtown, Mont., for purposes which it subsequently took the War Office three weeks to discover. I cursed my luck, for the name Newtown, I thought, could only have been given to some dreary agglomeration of 19th-century industrial urbanization or to an even drearier and more sterile scattering of between-the-wars semi-detacheds. But when I emerged into the sunlight on Newtown station at 6 a.m. on a July morning and saw the rounded hump of a very green hill on one side of the line and the red-brick masses of mill and warehouse buildings on the other I knew somehow that I was going to like my new home. And I did.

Instead of the 19th- or 20th-century dreariness which I had anticipated I found a small town balanced, as it were, athwart a wide street running roughly northwards to a pleasant old bridge across the River Severn, which seemed to lead to nowhere very much except the houses on the further bank. Looking up or down this central thoroughfare, aptly named Broad Street, the view was shut

off by looming hills, northward the Bryn and southward the Vastre, which here enclose the Severn valley. The road itself was an architectural hodge-podge of five centuries, with a cinema at one end, a public library topped by a domed clock-tower at the other, and a general predominance of market-town atmosphere.

Of the back streets, some contained rows of small half-timbered black-and-white houses, some the small red-brick terrace dwellings typical of early 19th-century industrialization, and some much taller, three- or four-storey brick buildings which, in my ignorance, I thought to be ordinary two-storeyed houses with later additions. In one or two places closes or courts, reached by passages from the streets, were still to be seen. Near the station was the imposing warehouse-and-office building which had impressed itself on me on my arrival. All in all, there seemed to be something that contrasted strongly and strangely with the dominant market-town atmosphere, as if the place had not always been content to play its present role. It was rather as if one had sailed into a hidden backwater which, without being in any way stagnant, had somehow become static—perhaps through a landslide or fall of rock which had cut it off from the main flow of traffic.

In one important respect, indeed, Newtown's history, for the last century at least, has been almost wholly static. In 1848 the town's population was 6500. In 1950 it was estimated at 5500. Very few localities in Britain can claim so little change in a hundred years, and only special factors of an unusual kind could have caused this failure either to grow or to dwindle.

In general, however, Newtown's history has been anything but static. In the days of the Roman occupation the valley of the Severn hereabouts was dominated by the military station upstream at Caersws, which may be the Mediolanum mentioned by Tacitus. Then came long centuries of upheaval and turmoil. After that the Normans moved up the valley; remains of a moat-and-bailey



castle can still be seen in the grounds of Newtown Hall. By the beginning of the 13th century a small hamlet, lying towards the northern end of the modern Broad Street beside a shallow ford, clustered round a church whose ruins still exist.

By that time, as conditions grew more settled, men were beginning to appreciate that this settlement inside the river's loop—its name was then Llanfair and it lay in the parish of Cedewain—was a natural cross-roads. Here the westward road from England (which then ran via Montgomery, above the valley swamps) was crossed by the north-south roads over the hills. On January 16, 1280, Edward I granted Roger de Mortimer of Castellforwyn a charter "that he and his heirs might hold one weekly market on Tuesday in the manor of Thlanveyr in Kedewey". For nearly 700 years that market has flourished without interruption, and it is still in its prime.

During the 14th century Newtown became noted for the wool and woollen goods it exported to England, northwards through Oswestry or eastwards through Shrewsbury. This industry (if we can call it that) was a purely domestic affair. The wool was grown on the upland sheep-farms in the hills around Newtown, especially to the west and south; it was spun by the women and woven by the men. Another 400 years passed. Now Newtown was known chiefly for its flannel, in the weaving of which the Welsh were pre-eminently skilful. The word "flannel", indeed, is only an English version of the Welsh

"gwlanen", from "gwlan", meaning wool.

Then came the Industrial Revolution. At the very outset, however, there occurred an event of importance not merely for Newtown but for the whole world. In 1771 the wife of a saddler and postman called Owen gave birth to a boy in Newtown. The child was christened Robert. Hence it is that, though most Englishmen and Scots associate only New Lanark with the name of Robert Owen, in countries like Holland or Denmark, or even further afield, wherever cooperative ideas are held in respect, Newtown enjoys its due meed of honour. Owen left Newtown for London when he was ten, to become first a draper's assistant and later a captain of industry and social reformer. When past eighty he returned to Newtown to end his life where it had begun. His tomb lies beside the ruins of the 13th-century church, and above a modern bank in Broad Street is a replica of the room in which he was born.

Two years after Owen had gone to London there was born near Newtown a man who probably had more influence on the town than anyone else before or after. His name was William Pugh. He it was who, largely with his own money, built the new turnpike road southwards to Llandrindod Wells and Builth, a road which keeps to the more or less sheltered valley instead of following the old drovers' routes and the roads that lead over the exposed hills. He also carried through, with his own and borrowed capital, the building of the canal which, in 1821, linked Newtown with the 200-mile waterway of the



A. J. Thornton

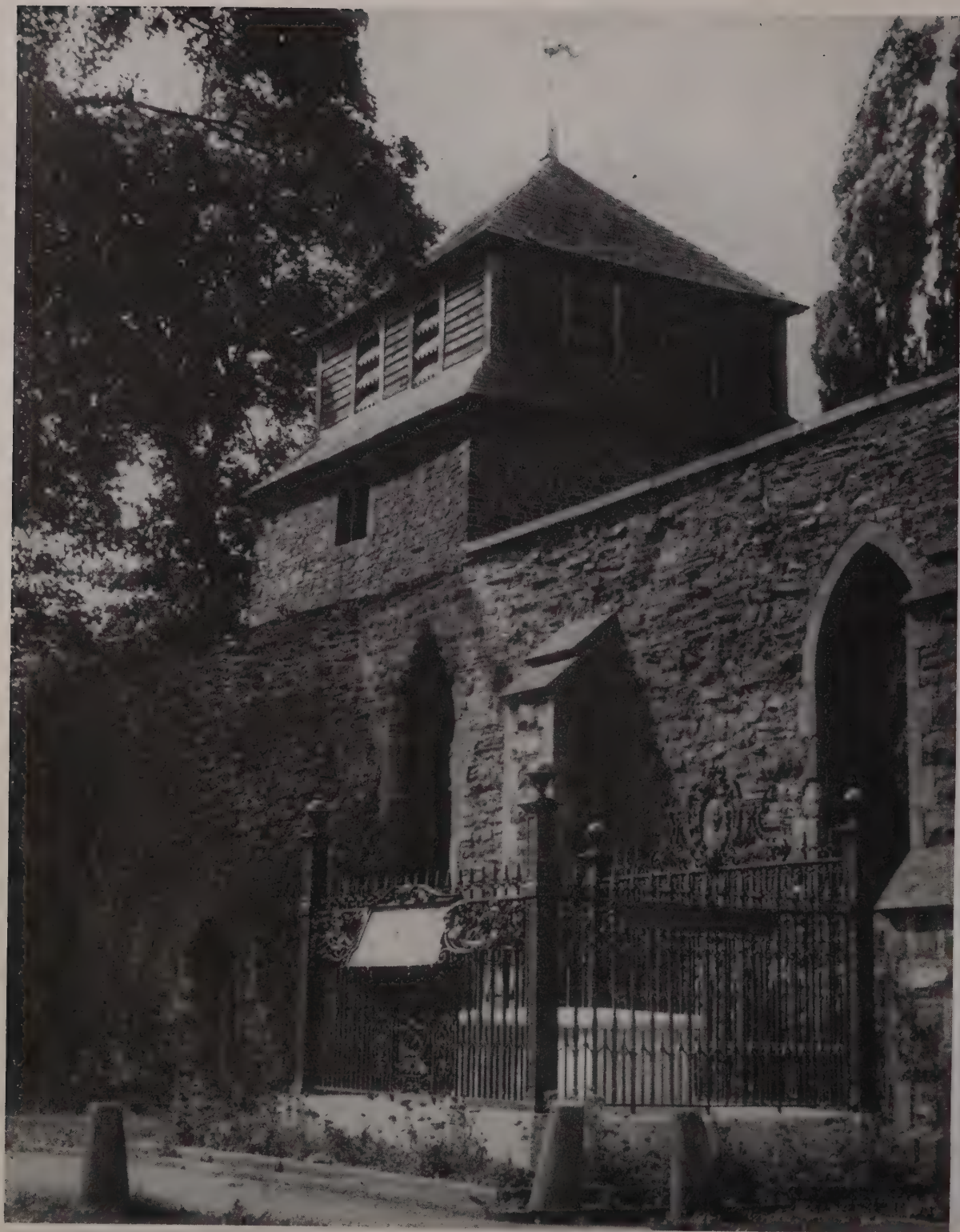


*All photographs by the author*

*(Above) Lying inside a loop of the Severn and surrounded by hills, Newtown was once an important communications centre: the valley-route was crossed by hill roads running north and south.  
(Below) The ford, near the modern bridge, by which these tracks crossed the river is still in use*



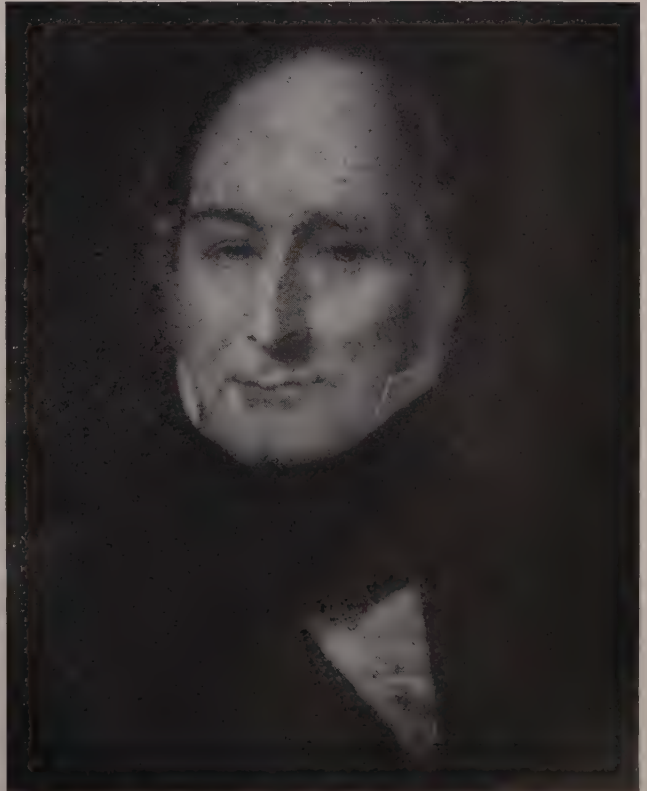




*Beside the ruined walls of the old church lies the tomb of the social reformer Robert Owen, born in Newtown in 1771. The decorative railings were erected by members of the Cooperative movement*



(Above) *The canal that links Newtown with the Shropshire Union Canal Company's system is now almost dry at its terminus just outside the town; but once it was highly important to the growth of the woollen industry which gave Newtown its 19th-century prosperity and caused it to be regarded as "the Leeds of Wales". The canal was made by (right) William Pugh, who also made the road to Builth—still actively used—which opened a way to markets in South Wales. Pugh, more than anyone else, was responsible for the town's affluence: he had not ceased to engage in schemes to aid his beloved Newtown when he died, a bankrupt, in France*



*By courtesy of the Rev. R. Beddoes*





*Broad Street, now Newtown's main thoroughfare, is a hotch-potch of five centuries' architecture, where traditional black-and-white rubs shoulders with stereotyped bank and chain-store buildings*

Shropshire Union Canal system. That caused an immediate drop of 30 per cent in the price of coal and lime. But though Pugh had secured two good channels through which his beloved Newtown could carry its flannel to the growing market of South Wales—good flannel shirts used to be a necessity to every Welsh miner—he was too trusting a character and no hard-headed financier. He died as Beau Brummel had done not so many years before him, a bankrupt in exile at Caen.

Meanwhile, the Industrial Revolution was running its course. The waterpower of the Severn and of the streams which flow down from the hills had been harnessed for spinning. Square, unattractive red-brick mills sprang up everywhere. Next the hand-loom weavers needed to be efficiently grouped to deal with the vastly increased output of the spinneries. The taller houses in Newtown are, of course, relics of this stage. They are weavers' houses. The men and their families lived in the lower two storeys. The upper floor or floors, reached by outside stairs and extending the whole length of a block, were

occupied by the handlooms.

Local men of property put their money into the new textile trade and when the canal was built, creating the spectacular drop in coal and lime prices, Newtown began to race ahead of its rival Llanidloes, twelve miles up the valley. In about 1832 an imposing Flannel Exchange was built in Broad Street. With the removal of certain county offices to Newtown the place began to consider itself the county town of Montgomeryshire. A few years later local editors saw fit to couple reports of Newtown's trade with those of Bradford, Leeds, Rochdale and Halifax—and editors then were not quite so readily given to flights of fancy as they are now. Men were even beginning to take seriously William Pugh's remark: "I hope to make Newtown the Leeds of Wales."

Prosperity grew apace, despite Chartist activities in the town. By 1867 output was given as 3000 pieces a month, from 12,000 looms. Then came the crash. Within ten years there were only eighteen flannel and five tweed factories left.

Opinions vary about the cause of the decline. Bad accounting and poor organization, say some. Opposition to new machinery and new methods, say others. The town's distance from coal supplies coupled with the growth of railways and cheap transport is yet another view. But whatever the cause, the decline was definite and drastic. In the course of the next few years large numbers of weavers and their families migrated to Yorkshire, mostly to Huddersfield. Almost the last great contribution made by Newtown to the country's woollen trade was the establishment in 1859 of the Pryce-Jones warehouses, the very first mail-order firm in Britain which, almost on the eve of the extinction of the town's textile manufacturing career, made the name of Newtown known throughout the length and breadth of the land. But in a decade the town's prosperity had vanished.

What remains now of those spacious days? At Mochdre, three miles from the centre of Newtown, one last mill is still at work with machinery nearly all a hundred years old, operated by Mr and Mrs Leach, the fifth generation of couples to run the business. The stream is running dry and a diesel engine is used to supply power, spare parts for the

decrepit machines can no longer be obtained, and when Mr and Mrs Leach are dead there will be no-one to take over. In the town the weavers' houses, in many cases, are now given over to other trades or, if the lower storeys are still lived in, the upper have become either workrooms or drying rooms for the weekly wash. The grandiose Flannel Exchange, that was to rival Bradford itself, after serving in turn as Public Hall, Post Office, Dance Room and Skating Rink has now become the town's one and only cinema.

The canal, which was still the local anglers' rendezvous when I first got to know it, is now practically dry from its terminus just below Newtown as far as the first lock, about a mile and a half away. Heaven knows how many years it is since a laden boat passed that way. Though the men and women who migrated to Yorkshire must all be dead by now some of their children, who can remember their early days in Newtown, still revisit their birthplace during Huddersfield's annual wakes week. And every year, so I am told, for I have never seen this sight for myself, these old people can be seen weeping copiously as they board the coaches that are to take them back to Yorkshire. Newtown is still somewhat

*The Tuesday market, held without interruption since 1280, still draws housewives from twenty miles or more away. Even more important to farmers, however, are the day's sales of sheep and cattle*







*(Above) Years ago weavers lived with their families in the two lower storeys of these houses and worked at looms set up in long rooms on the second and third floors. (Below) In the district's last surviving woollen mill Mr Leach, the owner, casts an eye over his hundred-year-old machines*





wanly referred to as the county town of Montgomeryshire, hopefully rather than factually, since the assizes are held in Welshpool and the main county offices are equally divided between Newtown and Montgomery. The Pryce-Jones woollen warehouse, however, still towers proudly above the railway station, and something of the spirit of Newtown's heyday still lingers in its streets and gives the little town, which is not, after all, particularly attractive in appearance, a peculiar appeal.

Yet Newtown has something more than just its history with which to please. After all, practically every square foot of Britain is packed with past associations that can fascinate and delight. Here, however, geography no less than history has contrived to make Newtown a place apart. Its Border characteristics have been emphasized rather than destroyed by the strange story of the rise and fall of the woollen industry. Janus-headed, Newtown can look down the valley and feel that its roots and traditions are not really English; and it can look up the valley and feel that it is not wholly Welsh. Within a few miles, indeed, much of the best of both

worlds is to be had. The land of Housman's *Shropshire Lad* is not far off—and what could be more English? Beyond Kerry lies the Mary Webb country, the scene of *Gone to Earth* and other of her novels. Kerry itself, only three miles from Newtown, has remained extraordinarily English.

Like all the border region, the Newtown district is rich in black-and-white half-timbered architecture. In Broad Street itself stands the fine old Black Boy Hotel, and on the Bryn, overlooking the valley, is a highly decorated farmhouse whose gable bears the cryptic inscription, "Not we from kings but kings from us" and the date 1660. What it all signifies we can only guess. Travel a few miles up the valley, however, and you will find only Welsh stone and Welsh slate. There are children living within ten or fifteen miles of Newtown who speak only Welsh.

It is, perhaps, this fusion of traditions that has produced such a goodly crop of individualists, not to say eccentrics, in the Newtown region. Local folk protest that the proportion of oddities in the population is no greater than elsewhere, but it certainly seems so to one accustomed to the uniform medi-

*Towering above Newtown's little railway station are the lofty buildings of the Pryce-Jones woollen warehouse. Founded when Newtown's prosperity was already declining, it was the first mail-order house in Britain, and made the name of Newtown known from one end of the land to the other*





ocrity of our great towns. My favourite Newtown character, apart from certain living persons whom it would be invidious to mention, is the ultra-uxorious Sir John Pryce, fifth baronet, born at Newtown Hall in about 1698. In his early twenties he married a woman to whom he was passionately devoted; but before long she died. He had her embalmed and placed in a glass coffin at his bedside. Two years later he married another woman to whom he was equally devoted and took her and (for some reason) the Newtown church organ, together with his embalmed first wife whom he continued to station at his bedside, to live in Buckland, some thirty miles away. After a while his second wife, understandably, one feels, also departed this life, and was duly embalmed, placed in a glass coffin and given a position of honour on the

*What puzzles the stranger who knows nothing of rural Newtown's history is the way in which many of the back streets appear more appropriate to an industrial town*

other side of his bed. Before long, Sir John elected to marry again, and one wonders how he would finally have disposed of his third spouse had she not insisted on her two predecessors being decently interred before the wedding. For she did not outlive him. At the time of his death he was projecting a fourth marriage.

It would be strange if fervent Welsh and English Nonconformism did not both flourish in Newtown. There are, in fact, places of worship belonging to Baptists, English Congregationalists, English Presbyterians, Wesleyan Methodists, Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, Welsh Independent Methodists and Plymouth Brethren. Lesser sects also have their organized adherents but no formal meeting-places. Including the parish church of Llanllwchaarn, which for practical purposes is part of Newtown, there are in addition three Anglican churches and, to crown everything, a vigorous Roman Catholic community led by a parish priest who is a great-grandson of William Pugh and was formerly a London publisher. The Catholics recently caused quite a flutter in Newtown's religious dovecotes by not only converting a disused riverside mill into a beautiful little church but also opening their own day and boarding school.

In point of fact, a Catholic minority has existed for a long time in Montgomeryshire and supported the King in the Civil War. In 1645 Charles I, journeying wearily north after Naseby, stayed overnight at Newtown Hall. There is a possibility, too, that the name of the Black Boy Hotel may refer to Charles II, who bore this nickname because of his dark complexion, although the brewers, playing for safety, have erected a modern sign showing a Negro.

Yet despite its mixture of influences and traditions Newtown in many ways is indisputably Welsh. Music, especially choral music, naturally flourishes. In the lounge of the Black Boy you are more than likely to meet a commercial traveller who, instead of the usual chatter of his kind, will keep you up till past midnight enthusing over Handel. Literature has its devotees, too. In the







*Newtown's post-war housing estate is well and spaciouly planned. If only all local authorities would build estates that merge as effectively into their country surroundings as this one does!*

villages on the Welsh side of Newtown the man who sells you a packet of cigarettes or a railway ticket may well be a bard whose name is honoured wherever Welsh is understood. One of the present generation of Pryce-Joneses is not exactly unknown in the wider literary life of Britain.

For all its Welshness, however, Newtown at times appears very cut off from the surrounding countryside. This is partly a matter of communications. If you go there without your own means of transport you will find it very difficult to see much of the area round the town without doing a great deal of walking. If you *are* prepared to walk, however, you have a wealth of fascinating country within reach. You can go over the Vastre and the Kerry hills to the lonely old inn at Anchor, rich in ancient associations. Many of the "green roads" and the drove roads down which sheep and cattle used to be driven all the way to London can still be followed. There are isolated upland hamlets like Wig and Sychnant to be discovered and the hos-

pitable little inn at Dolfor to be visited. It is really a farmhouse and only an inn in its spare time, so to speak. Westward lies Llanidloes, and beyond that the wild marshes of Plynlimmon, home of Severn and Wye. Northwest lies Carno and the practically unknown "Little Lake District". All this region, to the casual passer-by, may seem unspectacular compared with, say, Devil's Bridge or Cader Idris. But if you stay long enough to get to know it you will find yourself returning to Newtown time and time again, as I do myself and as do scores of others who owe their knowledge of the place's existence solely to a wartime Army posting.

Since I first knew Newtown the signs of increased prosperity in the surrounding region have become most marked. Many a farmer's wife who, in 1942, would bid us good day as she splashed through the mud on the upper Dolfor road carrying a basket of eggs to the packing station now travels by car and the road has had to be metalled. Ramshackle repairs to ramshackle farm-





*The Black Boy Hotel in Broad Street, dating from the 15th century, contains much fine half-timber work. Until 1946 part of its interior walls still consisted of the original mud-and-wattles*

houses no longer exist; scores of their occupants have become freeholders instead of tenants. This prosperity naturally reflects itself in Newtown, whose market and tradesmen flourish. One thing that will strike you if you look in Newtown's shop windows is—if I may use the word—the surprisingly 'unprovincial' taste of the more expensive clothes. Excellent taste, too, is the hallmark of the new housing estate that lies beyond the Army's semi-derelict hutted camp.

Yet in spite of this prosperity and in spite of the great activity of such things as the choral societies there is a certain deadness of feeling in Newtown. This is inevitable, I suppose, in a town whose population is pretty well exactly the same as it was a century ago. For it means that the place's most important

export for generations past has been human beings. They have left, especially the younger folk, for the simple reason that there is not enough work for them all in Newtown. To-day, like so many small market-towns in this era of improved transport and greater industrial centralization, Newtown is tending slowly to lose its importance. For employment the town is perilously dependent on a single small factory—a subsidiary of a larger concern—making bicycle parts. If it closes, something in the nature of a slump will hit Newtown. Here, surely, is a case for the responsible authorities to do some of the "planning for human happiness" that is often talked about but all too rarely achieved. To let our hideous urban wens go on expanding at the cost of places like Newtown seems to me the height of folly.